

We saw last time that Paul says that our whole salvation is found in Christ:

Ephesians 1 speaks of

redemption predestined (in Christ) by the Father
redemption accomplished (in Christ) by the Son
and redemption applied (in Christ) by the Spirit.

Tonight we turn then to Paul’s discussion of who we are in Christ.

You were dead, but God has made you alive with Christ.

You were strangers, but Christ has brought you near.

1. You Were Dead, and God Made You Alive with Christ (2:1-10)

I should point out that in Ephesians there is a strong contrast between ‘you’ and ‘us’ that runs through chapters 2-3.

*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked,
following the course of this world,
following the prince of the power of the air,
the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience –*

You Gentiles were dead in your sins.

You were following the course of this world.

You were following the prince of the power of the air – the devil –
the ruler of this age.

(Ever since Adam and Eve handed the lordship of earth over to the Serpent,
he has been the prince of this world.)

This is a very standard way for a Jew to talk about Gentiles.

What is surprising is what comes next in verse 3:

*among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh,
carrying out the desires of the body and the mind,
and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

Paul says that Jews are no different from Gentiles.

We were all by nature children of wrath.

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile.

As Paul has said in Romans,

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Our identity (whether Jew or Gentile) was once defined by the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And we “walked” according to this age.

Paul is using the language of the “two ages.”

This age of the world is defined by the ruler of the powers of the air.

We often pass over this language.

“the ruler of the powers of the air.”

What does this mean?

Think in terms of the world-view we have seen from Genesis 1-2.

God created three realms: the heavens, the earth, and the seas.

The raqia, the firmament is that blue thing above us,
which God named “Heavens.”

The sun, moon and stars are set *in* the heavens.

So the ruler of the powers of the air must refer to the ruler under the heavens.

The powers of the air are the powers that rule everything *under* the sun, moon and stars.

That realm was originally given to Adam.

If he had been faithful, Adam could have named “ruler of the powers of the air.”

But Adam handed his lordship over to the devil.

So you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked,

according to this age of the world,

according to the ruler of the powers of the air.

All the realm under heaven was the realm of sin and death.

All mankind were by nature children of wrath.

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,
even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ –
by grace you have been saved –
and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace
in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

Okay, keep in view the picture:

in the resurrection of Christ, in the language of 1:20-21

*God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,
far above all rule and authority and power and dominion,
and above every name that is named,
not only in this age but also in the one to come.*

You have to think both in terms of space and of time.

Spatially, Christ has been exalted above the “powers of the air”

because he has been seated in the heavenlies –
he has been seated above the heavens.
And temporally, he has been the name above all names
not only in this age but also in the one to come.

And because of this, *you* who have been united with Christ
have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places.
And again, you need to see this in terms both of space and of time:
you have been raised up above the heavens – seated with Christ in the heavenlies –
and while this has happened *in history*, it has future consequences for the age to come.

Why?

Because the resurrection of Jesus signals the coming of the age to come.
Last time we saw this in terms of the language of the “arrabon” –
the downpayment, the guarantee, the engagement ring –
the promised Holy Spirit who has sealed us.

Jesus has received the promised inheritance.
He has been exalted to the right hand of the Father.
And we who were predestined for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ
now receive the Spirit of his Son as the guarantee of that inheritance.

In other words, we *now* partake of the age to come
because we have been united to the one who has entered the age to come!

This helps us understand the full significance of Ephesians 2:8-9
*For by grace you have been saved through faith.
And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

You were dead.
How can a dead man save himself?
You were under the ruler of the power of the air.
How could you ascend above the heavens?

When we speak of total depravity,
we are not saying that humans are terrible, awful, despicable creatures.
We are simply saying that no one is strong enough to overthrow the devil.
No one is good enough to save himself.
We were all under the power of the world, the flesh and the devil.

Only God can save.

Salvation is a gift.
Indeed, even faith is a gift.

The grammar of verse 8 makes it clear that the whole package is a gracious gift.

The “this” (of “And this is not your own doing”) is neuter.

All of the preceding nouns are feminine.

So the “this” cannot be referring to any one of the preceding nouns,
but must be taken as referring to “this whole situation.”

Everything that Paul has just explained is a gift of God.

But because this is God’s work – God’s gift –
therefore we cannot go back to what we once were:

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Verses 1-10 begin and end with “walking.”

In verse 2 the first sentence in this paragraph told us that we once “walked”
according to this age, according to the ruler of the powers of the air.

Now in verse 10 we hear that we participate in a new creation.

We have been created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The old path of this age is no longer our track.

We cannot walk there any longer.

We have a new path – a new way of life –

a way of life that is defined by the one who burst the leaguer of the heavens
and has been exalted over every power and dominion in every age!

So Paul’s first point in chapter 2 is that you were once dead,
but God made you alive.

You once walked in earthly ways,

but now, in Christ, you walk a heavenly path – the way of the age to come.

2. You Were Strangers, but Christ Has Brought You Near (2:11-22)

There is a way in which verses 11-22 repeat the same message as verses 1-10.

But there is another way in which Paul extends his theme further.

The contrast that we saw in verses 1-10 between Gentiles and Jews
is highlighted here quite explicitly in verses 11-22.

*Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh,
called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision,*

*which is made in the flesh by hands –
remember that you were at that time separated from Christ,
alienated from the commonwealth of Israel
and strangers to the covenants of promise,
having no hope and without God in the world.*

Once again we start off with the problem.

You were dead (2:1),
but you had a further problem: you were separated from Messiah.
You were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel
(from the “polity” of Israel).
This is the same root word that will be used in verse 19,
when Paul says that *now* you Gentiles are “fellow citizens.”
You were alienated from citizenship.
You had no place in the “polity” – no place in the city of God.

And you were strangers to the covenants of promise.

God’s promises were *not* to “you and your children.”

You had no hope.

You were atheoi – without God – in the world.

But then come those two little words most to be cherished in all the Greek language!

Nuni de

But now!

Paul loves to use this phrase when he is contrasting the former age with the age to come.
The present is imbued with future significance!
An eschatological “now” has arrived.

But now in Christ Jesus

you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

The atoning sacrifice of the cross has changed everything.

*For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one
and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...*

How?

How has Christ broken down in his flesh this dividing wall of hostility?

*by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances,
that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two,*

Wait.

“abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances”?

What does this mean?

What does Paul mean by “the law of commandments expressed in ordinances”?

He is referring to the whole Mosaic covenant.

After all, what is it that divided Jew from Gentile?

God himself had erected a dividing wall of hostility between them.

It is called the Torah.

The Mosaic covenant was *designed* to separate Israel from the nations.

The Levitical laws intentionally set up a barrier between Jew and Gentile.

And in his flesh, on the cross, through his death and the shedding of his blood,

Messiah has broken down that wall.

Notice how Paul repeats the title of Christ (Messiah) over and over again.

Messiah’s work was to abolish the Mosaic covenant.

If this sounds overly dramatic,

think about what the Jerusalem Council said in Acts 15:

they decreed that Gentiles did not have to observe the law of Moses!

As long as Gentiles stayed within the Noahic boundaries,

Jew and Gentile could be one in Christ.

*so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross,
thereby killing the hostility.*

In the cross of Christ, both Jew and Gentile were reconciled to God.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off

and peace to those who were near.

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

How does Christ preach peace to Jew and Gentile?

Through the apostolic preaching.

(Remember that the book of Acts is all about what Jesus continued to do and to teach through the apostles).

The ministry of Jesus the Messiah continues today

through the preaching of the gospel to the nations!
Because the same Spirit that was given to the exalted Christ
is the same Spirit that was poured out on the church at Pentecost –
and has continued to work through the preaching of the Word
to bring Jew and Gentile both to the Father.

We may now enter where we once were forbidden.

We have access –

not merely to an earthly temple

(the Jews refused Gentiles entrance there –

but we shouldn't care!

Why would we want access to an earthly temple

when we have the privilege of entering the heavenly one!

After all, the earthly temple was still under the thumb of prince of the power of the air.

It was symbolic of the present age – and was about to be destroyed.

In AD 70 the earthly temple was cast down

as a sign of the coming judgment against this age.

Indeed, Paul uses this temple language very explicitly in verses 19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,

but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,

Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

in whom the whole structure, being joined together,

grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God

by the Spirit.

You are not strangers.

You are not sojourners.

You are citizens!

You are members of God's household.

Notice that Paul is not hostile to the Old Testament.

He sees that the prophets (together with the apostles) laid the foundation for this house.

But Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.

Paul mingles a variety of images here:

the city – being a citizen of the city of God

the household – being a part of the family of God

the temple – being built into a dwelling place for God
but also “growing” – a more organic image reminiscent of the language of the olive tree.

All of this is because Jesus Christ has brought together in himself – in his flesh –
one new man through the cross.

Everything else in Ephesians is rooted in this.

Actually, everything else in *life* is rooted in this!

Because of what Jesus has done (and who we are in him)
we are to grow up into Christ and become mature (4:15)
we must no longer *walk* like the Gentiles (4:17), but instead we must walk in love (5:2)
we must forgive one another (4:32)
we must turn away from fruitless works of darkness (5:11)
we must reflect the household of God in our own households (5:22-6:9)
and we must fight a spiritual battle against the cosmic powers of darkness
because we have been united to the one who has pierced the veil
and ascended to the right hand of God!

Frank Peretti once wrote a novel “Piercing the Darkness” about spiritual warfare.
It’s a great title – but one that missed the point.
Because this present darkness *has been pierced* by our Lord Jesus Christ,
as he ascended on high,
ripping to shreds the canopy of darkness that held us all enslaved below.

The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ has been established at the right hand of the Father.
And you are citizens of that kingdom,
members of that household,
living stones in that organic temple,
a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.