

EPHESIANS CHAPTER 2

By Charles Dailey © 2014 Revised 12/6/2023 NLT CPS
Printed 12/7/2023

Previous:

The first chapter describes the *wonderful blessings* that were for the Jewish believer and shows they apply equally to the Gentile believers.

1. In order to fully appreciate the blessings in Christ, readers need to understand where they were prior to making Jesus their Lord. The contrast will deepen the appreciation. To comprehend their *present wealth*, they must understand their *former poverty*.
2. A component of the contrast is to describe the realm of the spirit that contains a number of deities. Jesus is superior to all of them. This was a local concept and Paul is using their understanding of the spiritual realm to show the excellence of Jesus. It is informative that *Ephesians is the only book that talks about the "heavenly places."*
3. The best-known local god was Diana of the Ephesians. But there were small temples all up and down Harbor Street. Paul acknowledges the realm of spiritual powers inhabited by demons and says that Jesus is the ruler of the spiritual realm. He is above all others.

THE WAY GENTILES LIVED IN THE PAST

(Ephesians 2:1-2) Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. (2) You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil -- the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.

- **William MacDonald** writes:

(In chapter one) we watched the mighty power of God as it raised Christ from the grave and crowned Him with glory and honor. Now we see how that same power has worked in our own lives, raising us from spiritual death and seating us in Christ in the heavenlies.

- Paul is directing his statement (vs. 1) to the Gentile segment of the church. The language is too severe to describe the conscientious Jewish synagogue members. Their part comes in verse three.
- **Dead** here is not separated from God as in many other places, but corpse-like (*nekroús*). Gentiles were the walking **dead** in relation to God (vs. 1). They might have been very much alive in other areas such as social life, work life and others ways.
- **John Stott** writes:

“They are *blind* to the glory of Jesus Christ, and *deaf* to the voice of the Holy Spirit. They have *no love* for God, *no sensitive awareness* of his personal reality, *no leaping* of their spirit towards him in the cry, ‘Abba, Father,’ *no longing* for fellowship with his people. They are as unresponsive to him as a corpse. So we should not hesitate to affirm that a life without God (however physically fit and mentally alert the person may be) is a living death, and that those who live it are dead even while they are living.”

Disobedience (vs.1) includes events that go beyond God’s boundaries and **sin** is missing God’s target or mark. Neither is acceptable conduct.

- **You used to live in sin** (vs.2) separates the listeners from Paul, showing that he has in mind the Gentiles. They used to live (or walk) that way when they served the demon

spirits. Whatever prince Satan said, they did. They were controlled by popular opinion where Satan is in control. "Everybody is doing it."

- There is nothing here that says "everyone is a child of God." Rather the disobedient are under the **power of the commander of the unseen world.**

(3) All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

- But this is true of more than Satan-obedient Gentiles. "We Jews," Paul says, "had the same problems." No one is holy by **nature**. If he were with us today, Paul would not be a Humanist that sees good in everyone and ignorance as the only problem. **Sin**, not ignorance, is our greatest problem.
- We did what we felt like - indulging in the **desires** of our **sinful nature** equals being driven by feelings. "How do you feel about it" is heard everywhere as the lynchpin for deciding right from wrong. This problem crosses all racial lines.
- Being a descendants of Abraham was not a defense against sin. In many ways, Paul says, "We Jews are just like you Gentiles."
- The sin includes whatever the wicked mind could dream up to do. Our entertainment industry leads the way in making wicked practices widely understood and desirable. The gambling industry is built on getting the possessions of others.

THE NEW CONDITION

(4) But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much,

- Both Gentiles and Jews were destined for **God's** wrath. But then, there was the **love** of **God** that outweighed His wrath. **Love** is **God's** great quality.

- From that **love** flows **His mercy** towards us. His **love** is the root cause of his **mercy**.

For God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Or again in 1st John:

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. (8) But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (9) God showed how much He loved us by sending His one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. (10) This is real love -- not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

1 John 4:7-10

- **God** did not **love** us because we were lovable, but because He is **loving**. Consider 1 John 4:7 - 12. To sense the reality of this, let us call to mind the most repulsive person that we have met. We certainly cannot love him because of his charm.

(5) that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)

- Notice the continuing use of "**we**" and "**us**," Jews and Gentiles. **God** reached down to give us **life**.
- We moved from being a spiritual corpse (**dead**) into a life coupled with **Christ**. This is a resurrection by definition.
- This resurrection was not our doing, but the **grace** of **God**.

(6) For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. (7) So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of His grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all He has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

- From a tiny beginning of life, we were **raised** (resurrected) with **Jesus** and now sit in **heavenly realms**. (Discussed in detail in 1:3.) We are far above the gods on Harbor Street so the local deities are *beneath* all believers.
- We haven't heard the whole story yet. It hasn't played out. There is much more to unfold in **ages** to come (vs. 7). **God** is making history for all to see.
- It would be wonderful to see that believers will enjoy the riches (vs. 7) of God's **kindness**. But Paul says they are more than simply riches, they are **incredible wealth** towards us because we are in **Christ**.
- **Kindness** (vs. 7) is love in action.

(8) God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. (9) Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

- Believers are saved by **grace**. This is **God's** part. And so were love and mercy **God's** part. It was **God** that made us alive and raised us up. (Verses 5 and 6.)
- Calvinists point out that even **faith** comes from **God** and we could not be saved without His choice of us. This is contradicted by the footnote in the *New American Standard Bible* that reads: "that salvation." To rephrase:

"You have been saved through faith; and that salvation is not of yourselves."

- We are not able to save ourselves. It is totally by **God** and from **God**. It is His **gift** to believers.
- We cannot earn **salvation**. Our baptism in order to identify with Christ is not a work of merit. Its value is symbolic and not meritorious. If merit was our objective, it would be better to mow a widow's lawn than to be immersed. The lawn-mowing is active while the immersion is passive -- someone else baptizes us.
- If a few good people could earn **salvation**, they would really have something to talk about — to **boast** about.

(10) For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.

- **Masterpiece. God** is making something meaningful and worthwhile out of us. Our purpose in life is now of His making. This being true, we could not have had a part in creating or earning salvation.
- We are not saved **by** good works, but **for** good works.
- This is not a recent idea from heaven either, but is part of the God's great plan of the ages. It was part of God's looking far-ahead planning. Ephesian 1:4.

WHAT GENTILES MUST REMEMBER

(11) Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. (12) In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.

- **William Barclay** writes:

“The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made . . . It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world.

Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death.”

- This writer was present when *Felix Freedman*, a solid member of the Jewish community in San Jose, California accepted Jesus as his Messiah. It was reported that the Jewish community had his funeral while he enjoyed his new life in **Christ**.
- Before their life of faith, Gentiles had missed out on five crucial relationships:
 - They were **living apart** from the Messiah of Israel. The Scriptures had pointed to Him over and over as the way of salvation. They were missing out entirely. A very few had become proselytes to Judaism.
 - They were **excluded** from God’s people Israel. Even though Israel was rejecting their Messiah, their lifestyle was far superior to that of the Gentiles.
 - They were **did not know the covenant promise** God had with His people Israel. Names like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were unknown to them. In their culture, they learned the names of various gods and their escapades.

- Life was without a purpose. There was **without hope** beyond death's inevitable door. They could not rightly answer the question, "Why are we here?"
- Their deities were local idols that could not offer help. Diana was the best known of them, but Harbor street was lined with small idol temples. They were **without God**.

THINGS ARE DIFFERENT NOW

(13) But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to Him through the blood of Christ.

- Their new position is in **Christ**. Paul does not let them forget.
- The shed **blood of Christ** was for both Gentiles that were far off and Jews, all brought close to God first, and then to each other.

(14) For Christ Himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in His own body on the cross, He broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. (15) He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in Himself one new people from the two groups. (16) Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of His death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

- **Christ's** first word to His disciples after His resurrection was "**Peace.**" John 20:19. He is **peace** in person, **peace** on two feet.
- It means they were made **one new people from two groups** and they were in **one body**. The death of Jesus abolished the age-old **hostility** of **Jews and Gentiles**. The reasons for separation were abolished.

- Herod's Temple at Jerusalem was partitioned. **Jews** could go in the inner areas, but the **Gentiles** were banned on pain of immediate death.
- There were signs up at the Temple in Jerusalem warning **Gentiles** not to enter the inner parts. Two of the actual signs have been located. We are not left to guess what they may have contained. Here is the English translation:

No Man Of Alien Race Is To Enter
Within The Barricade Which
Surrounds The Temple. Anyone
Who Is Caught Doing So Will Have
Himself To Blame For The Penalty of
Death That Follows.

- The Old Testament system of laws and ordinances for the **Jews** was **ended** (vs. 15) by the sacrifice of Jesus. This ends the keeping of special days, the observance of special diets, and the keeping of the Sabbath days. Eating the proper food is no longer the way to God. Peter had to learn that in Acts 10.
- The keeping of the ordinances of the Old Testament caused a deep enmity between **Jews** and **Gentiles**. Jews looked on the Gentiles with contempt as pagans, and the Gentiles thought of the Jews as narrow-minded religious fanatics. Now they were reconciled into **one body** – the church.

THE GREATEST PEACE AGREEMENT IN HISTORY

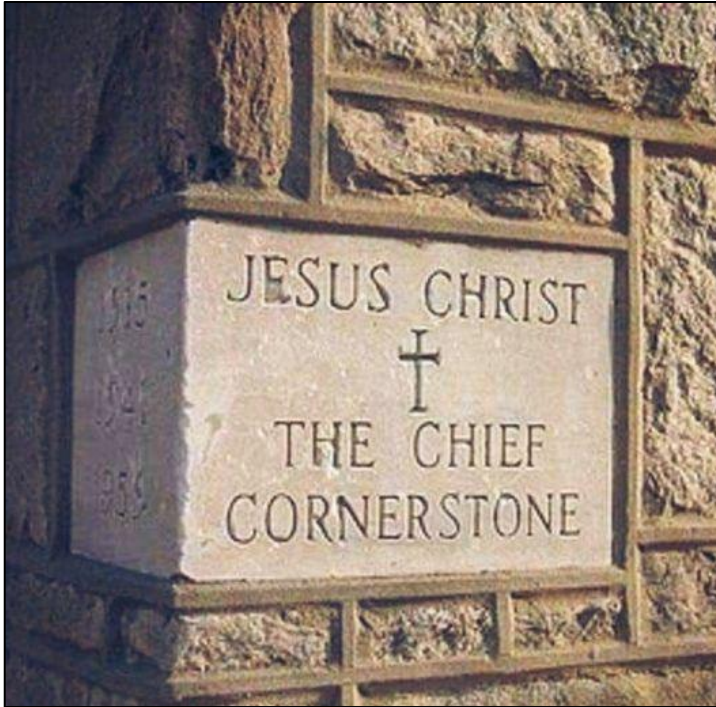
(17) He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from Him, and peace to the Jews who were near. (18) Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

- If Israel was the **near** group, then the Gentiles were those **far away**.
- Both groups have the same **Holy Spirit**, giving us all access **to the Father**. Having access to the Ruler of the Universe is not a trivial matter. Most of us do not even have access to the mayor of our own town. Corporations and other groups pay enormous sums of money to lobbyists for access to law makers. Access is life or death to many organizations.

(19) So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. (20) Together, we are His house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus Himself.

- Earlier in verse 12 it was established that they were **strangers**. They did not know **God** or His chosen people.
- They had been **strangers and foreigners**. In no way could they be considered citizens of God's great kingdom. Not even visitors.
- Now they are fellow **citizens**. They are not in the kingdom with a temporary passport, they are in it with citizenship papers.
- **House**. Now they are family. Adopted children inherit with natural-born children.
- The **foundation** was the verbal and written message, not the persons, of the **apostles and prophets**. The 12 were promised inspiration to get the story of Jesus right. John 14: 26; 16:13 -14.
- **Prophets** eventually included in writing the message were Mark, Luke, James and Jude.
- The Church is built on the written record of the **apostles and prophets**. This has provided the stability to the message that has lasted nearly 20 centuries. Both Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches rely on *tradition*, both oral and written, rather than on the written record of the **apostles and prophets**.

- It is **Jesus** who holds the story together – makes it cohesive. He is the **corner stone** that must be in place before the **foundation** is laid.



JEW AND GENTILES ARE PARTS OF THE SAME TEMPLE

(21) We are carefully joined together in Him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. (22) Through Him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by His Spirit.

- The church is like a **temple** that is being built (growing). It is not material and not in one place. It is international. And construction never ceases.

The temple is **holy** (vs. 21). Activities at the local temples in Ephesus were not **holy**. Far from it. Our conduct in the day-to-day world must not include much of its entertainment and the values created by that entertainment.

- **Dwelling.** It is the **temple for the Lord** (Jesus, vs. 21), God (the Father) dwells in it by His Spirit. The Father, Son and Spirit are all involved.
- Paul spoke of the Christians as a group (together). This is far removed from the individualism of today where people claim to love Christ but stay away from “organized churches.”

