

## Group Study Outline

### Ephesians 2:1-22 Theme Sentence

Jesus' death & resurrection totally changes everything, reconciling us both to God and to each other.

#### Launching Question

In general, along what lines are people divided? (*race, cultural stuff, etc.*) What solutions does the world offer? Do these divisions ever creep into the church?

In this section Paul looks at our alienation from each other & from God.

READ Ephesians 2:1-22

(Start by looking at v1-10.)

What were we in the past?

What are we now?

How has this change happened?

#### Thinking it through

Why were we dead? What were we following?

Is that how we view ourselves before we knew Jesus?

Why is God's love for us so amazing? (*v5 & the contrast of 'before' & 'after'*)

Where do our good works fit in with our salvation?

Re-READ Ephesians 2:11-22

Having looked at our relationship with God, now Paul talks about our relationship with other Christians.

What were we?

What are we now?

How has this happened?

#### Thinking it through

Given what we see here about Jews & Gentiles, why might it have been hard for them to get along together in church?

Are there divisions like that today? How does Jesus knock down those 'walls'?

What do we learn from the different parts of 'the temple' in v20-22?

#### Wrapping it up

How can these great truths about what God has done for us help us be united?

Are there specific situations when we need to remember the gospel in this way?

#### PRAY

*(Remember that God's plan for everything is to unite everything in Christ, beginning with the church, and that all this is to bring praise to God's earth-shattering grace and kindness. So when praying that all this would sink in deeply, keep the focus on praising God for this turnaround, for bringing divided and dead people to life and uniting them together with Him and each other!)*

# Ephesians 2:1-22



## Setting the scene

The story so far in Ephesians has been that God has a wonderful plan to unite everything in Jesus to the praise of the glorious grace. This plan is great news for us because it includes showing mind-blowing love and mercy to people like us! The plan that God has for the whole universe at the end of time is already happening in the church! Christians have every blessing they could ever need.

Last time we overheard Paul's prayer life and picked out some of priorities as we saw the kinds of things he prayed for the Ephesian believers. He prayed that they might know "the hope to which he has called you" (1:18) which is God's great plan, understand "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (1:18) which is God's view of the church, and grasp more of "the immeasurable greatness of [God's] power towards us who believe" (1:19). The big example of God's power is Him raising Jesus from the dead (1:20).

In our passage, we get to see just what this powerful act of God has done for us in our relationship with God and with other believers. The gospel turns everything around. Dead people come to life! Strangers become family! What a transformation! We delve deeper into the wonder of the gospel as Paul takes us through what we were, what we are now and how on earth this incredible change could have happened!

### Ephesians 2:1-22 Theme Sentence

Jesus' death & resurrection totally changes everything, reconciling us both to God and to each other.

## Application

Paul doesn't get into the nuts and bolts of *how* this stuff applies until the second half of Ephesians in 4:1. But there is still plenty of heart-change work that needs to happen if Ephesians 2 is going to impact us!

- **Believing.** The stress is on salvation by grace alone. We only need to trust God's grace to be saved. We can't earn it. Urge each other to rely on God alone for your salvation.
- **Remembering.** In v11 and 12 the call is to remember what we were B.C., before Christ! Not moping about past sin but reminding one another of what God has done for us in bringing us to life when we were dead, etc.
- **United.** Despite appearances, Christians are united. Think through the implications of there being in reality no division between Christians.

## Commentary

1-2 Paul packs no punches. Non-Christians are dead. Even now. They are as responsive to God as a corpse; without any spiritual life. This is very shocking, but that is the tragedy of human life. Without God, however nice or active people may be, they are the walking dead. But this is not just 'that lot out there'; this is what Christians once were!

What is the root of this deadness? Trespasses and sins. The first denotes crossing a line or deviating from a path, the latter implies missing the mark. These are the ways we used to walk in.

And we were playing follow-my-leader with some bad company. We followed the general flow of the world, going with the crowd in a world that is opposed to God. We followed Satan, the evil spirit who exerts real power in the spiritual realm & works in disobedient people.

3 And we followed the passions of our flesh (not just sexual), our own sinful desires, actually doing those bad things we deep down want to do. Having chased after 'the world, the flesh & the devil', we are left utterly condemned before God. This doesn't just apply to one particularly sinful group of people; "we all once lived" this way. Being under God's wrath is to be "like the rest of mankind." Jews, Gentiles, northerners, southerners, everyone. v1-3 is not a pretty picture.

4-7 This is one of the biggest 'buts' in the Bible! The words "But God" show that He has stepped into the mess and reversed everything for Christians. We were facing God's wrath but now we receive His love. We were dead but now we're alive. How amazing that He loved us even when we were busy sinning against Him!

A big idea here is being "with/in Christ". Christians are so connected to Him that when He was raised from the dead, we were raised, and when He ascended into heaven, we were seated in heaven. That is our status right now. It all comes from God's great love and grace, and He does it to show the greatness of that grace. This ties in with 'the meaning of life' that Paul gave us back in chapter 1; to unite all things in Christ to the praise of God's glorious grace!

8-10 Paul can hardly contain himself in v5 and blurts out 'GRACE!' in the middle of his sentence! He really runs with that theme, banging it home for us. We have been saved by grace through faith. This is something we often get muddled when we say we are saved 'by faith alone'. Paul is clear that it is God's grace alone which saves us. Our faith (which is incidentally a gift!) is what connects us to God's grace. Paul makes clear that being saved is "not of your own doing" and "not a result of works".

It is all "the gift of God". Why? So that no one may boast. Why? Because we are *His* work! Praise God, not ourselves! So how should we think about our good works if we're not saved by them? God created (and re-created) us for good works, not by good works. We began walking in sin (v2), and we end up walking in good works (v10). God's grace brings a total turnaround.

11-12 Paul now takes us back to the 'before shot' in our grace makeover. We need to remember what we were. But this time it's not so much about our separation from God as our separation from one another. Paul is writing to Gentiles and he mentions a spat between them and the Jews; the issue of circumcision. Beyond name-calling, Gentiles really were alienated both from Christ and God's people. They knew nothing of God's promises to Israel. It is all summed up hauntingly as "having no hope and without God in the world."

13 Praise God for another "but"! Jesus has brought these far away people intimately close. How? By His blood.

14 In the temple, God dwelt in the Holy of Holies, cut off from almost everyone. The court just outside was only for priests. Further out were areas for Jewish men, then Jewish women. Outside all this there was a wall, which non-Jews couldn't go past on pain of death; a sign of their alienation from God & His people. Jesus' death has smashed that "dividing wall of hostility" to pieces. Everyone is on equal footing.

15-18 How was the wall knocked down? "By abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances." This is not to say that the moral law no longer applies at all, although in the gospel we see law removed as a means of salvation. But here it's primarily talking about the ceremonial aspects (washings, sacrifices, circumcision, diet, etc.) which divided Jews from Gentiles. Scrapping them makes us one people of God, not two. Hostility between people is killed when they both are reconciled to God, as both get to the Father in the Spirit through the same way, the Son. (Note that only Christian Jews and Gentiles are saved & united.)

19-22 So then? Strangers become family members, aliens become citizens. The outsiders are now in! Old barriers have been knocked down so that something new can be built; a people who are "a holy temple."

This temple's foundation is the word of God from the apostles and prophets (not an ongoing thing, as you only lay foundations once). This is the solid bedrock that God's people are built on. The cornerstone of the building is Jesus, the most important one, ensuring that the two walls come together perfectly. And the bricks are Christians. It is us (Jews and Gentiles "also") who are being built together into a community which God dwells in! Yes, we have the Spirit individually, but the focus here is on a diverse bunch of former enemies being built into one temple, one family, one man; the Church.