



The Believers' Possessions in Christ Ephesians 2

Introduction

Ephesians contains Paul's vision for the church as a growing body of born-again believers with Christ as the head. In Chapter 1, Paul presented the believer's position in Christ and the spiritual benefits, or blessings, of that position. In Chapter 2, Paul presents the believer's possessions in Christ: a new life, a new humanity, and a new purpose. These possessions are part of a new existence in the new humanity, bonded together by the Holy Spirit, in the most exciting venture of the ages.

Outline of Ephesians 2

- I. Born Into a Body of Believers - Ephesians 2:1-18
- II. Building Together - Ephesians 2:19-22

I. Born Into a Body of Believers - Ephesians 2:1-18

A. New Life - Ephesians 2:1-10

1. Our past condition - 2:1-3

a. Spiritually dead - verse 1

Ephesians 2:1 should be read, *And you who were dead in trespasses and sins*, without the phrase, *And you He made alive*, preceding it. Many translations insert the words "*He made alive*" into verse one even though they really belong at the end of verse five, as Paul wrote them. In their eagerness to get to the good part, translators destroyed both the effect and the suspense Paul desired. He wanted to describe just how dead we really were before giving the glorious fact that we have been made alive!

b. Walking according to the course of this world - verse 2

You once walked according to the course of this world. "Walk" in Scripture usually means one's conduct, behavior, actions, or habits. Before Christ comes into our lives we walk just as the world dictates. We adopt its speech, culture, values, and life-styles.

c. According to the prince of the power of the air - verse 2

This world is under the domination of Satan for a short time compared to eternity. He is its *prince*, though not

its king. Unbelievers are not as free as they think they are, but are under the influence, perhaps even the control, of Satan. He is the spirit who now works in the *sons of disobedience*, influencing their decisions, actions, appearance, relationships, work, and play.

d. The lusts of our flesh - verse 3

Before turning to Christ, we were controlled by our minds and bodies, dominated by physical urges, creature comforts, and a need to conform to the world. In addition to our physical being, "flesh" can also mean our selfish, self-centered, proud, rebellious old nature. Its desires formerly controlled us.

e. By nature children of wrath - verse 3

Because we were rebellious and disobedient to God, we were under God's condemnation. We were just like everyone else who is *dead in trespasses and sins* (2:1).

We may have been under the delusion that we were better than other sinners; intelligent, nice, "good" people. But it was illusion. Rudyard Kipling said, "The Colonel's lady and Susie O'Grady are sisters under the skin." And so are all who live outside of Christ, no matter how polished their exterior. Jesus called the Pharisees *white-washed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness* (Matthew 23:27).

2. Our present condition - 2:4-6

a. But God - verse 4

The words "*But God*" are interesting to trace through the Bible. They occur most dramatically to transform a situation.

b. Who is rich in mercy - verse 4

Mercy is the attribute God ascribes to Himself more than any other. His good deeds arise from His own character more than from the need of the object. He responds to the need of the object out of His mercy. "There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea" wrote Frederick W. Faber in his hymn of 1862. In the Old Testament, the place where God met the high priest, who represented His people, was called the *mercy seat* (Exodus 25:22). *His mercy endures forever* (Psalm 106:1).

- c. *Because of His great love with which He loved us* - verse 4

God's supreme motivation for creating and saving us is His love. *God is love* (1 John 4:8,16). *We love Him because He first loved us* (1 John 4:19).

- d. *When we were dead in trespasses* - verse 5

A dead person cannot respond. A dead person cannot do anything. Paul wrote, *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). We had nothing to do with our salvation. God the Father initiated it, Christ accomplished it, and the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin (John 16:8) and seals those who believe (Ephesians 1:13).

- e. *Made us alive* - verse 5

If anyone is in Christ, he [or she] is a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

- f. *Raised us up together....with Christ* - verses 6

When God raises us to new life, we become new creatures in Christ. Newly born believers are immediately joined to Christ, but the analogy with physical birth quickly diverges. A newborn baby is separated from its mother by cutting the umbilical cord. A new believer is joined, bonded, to Christ by the invisible scarlet cord of His blood (Joshua 2:18-21; 6:25).

We are already counted as raised with Christ, part of His resurrection, because of the certainty that it will happen. As Paul wrote to the Romans, *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be in the likeness of His resurrection* (Romans 6:4-5).

- g. *And made us sit together in the heavenly places* - verse 6

Just as Christ is seated in heaven, a place of rest, we are pictured as seated with Him. Positionally we are already there. God counts us there as much as Queen Elizabeth counts her son, Charles, as the future king of England. His position is assured. We are a heavenly people. Heaven is our home.

3. Our future condition - 2:7-10

God's purpose is *that in the ages to come He might*

show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

- a. *That in the ages to come* - verse 7

Are you a person who thinks this present life is all there is, and that life on this planet is the only kind of life there will ever be? The Bible teaches a future life for all of us. For some it will be with Christ forever. For others it will be a bleak eternity without Christ, though with memory and sensation (Luke 16:19-25).

- b. *The exceeding riches of His grace* - verse 7

Some day we will all share our stories of God's grace to us. This is part of what eternity will be all about, telling the *riches of his grace and His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*. It should be quite a joyous time.

- c. *For by grace you have been saved* - verse 8

Again, God's grace is the means of our salvation, through faith, which is the channel. Faith apart from God's grace could not save us. "The Holy Spirit has been very careful to guard this precious doctrine of salvation by grace against all forms of heresy" (Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Charles F Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, editors).

- d. *It is the gift of God, not of works* - verses 8-9

Salvation is a gift to be received through faith. No one can boast of having saved themselves (John 1:12-13).

- e. *We are His workmanship* - verse 10

The Greek word translated "workmanship" means "poem". Each of us is like a poem, God's masterpiece, a work of art. He is the Artist, creating each one in a unique way to display His creativity, to His glory.

Do you agree with God that you were once in Satan's domain, controlled by your flesh and old nature, as are all those without Christ today? If you are saved by God's grace, will you thank Him now for His precious gift? As His workmanship, will you tell others of His goodness and kindness to you?

B. New Humanity - Ephesians 2:11-18

1. Gentile alienation - 2:11-12

The word "*therefore*" begins a new thought. Our new birth gave us a new humanity. The old humanity was divided between Jew and Gentile since the time of

Abraham, whose descendants were to be separated to God and from ungodly Gentiles. Jews, who called themselves “the Circumcision”, referred to Gentiles as “the Uncircumcision”. But non-Jews were deprived in more ways and Paul lists them:

- *without Christ*
- *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel*
- *strangers from the covenants of promise*
- *having no hope and without God in the world.*

Gentiles had no hope of knowing God as long as they were Gentiles. They had to become Jews to be included in God’s covenants and promises. Ruth, the Moabitess, and Rahab, the Canaanites, Uriah the Hittite, and his wife Bathsheba are some Gentiles who found refuge under the wings of the God of Israel (Ruth 2:12).

2. Gentile inclusion - 2:13-18

a. *In Christ* - verse 13

Now, saved Gentiles are *in Christ* just as much as are saved Jews. This fact caused much dispute and was the basis for the first church council which was held in Jerusalem by the apostles in the first century (Acts 15; Galatians 2).

b. *You who were once far off have been brought near* - verse 13

It is *by the blood of Christ*, today as well as then, that Gentiles who were far from God are brought very close to Him.

“Near, so very near to God,
I cannot nearer be.
For in the person of His Son,
I am as near as He.
Dear, so very dear to God,
More dear I cannot be.
The love wherewith He loves the Son,
Such is His love to me.” (from hymn "A Mind at Perfect Peace with God", Catesby Paget, 19th century).

c. *He Himself is our peace* - verse 14

Peace is not only something Jesus gives, it is also something Jesus is. *He Himself is our peace* does not refer to personal peace as it does elsewhere in Scripture. The peace Jesus gives has many applications. Thanks to His atoning death we have *peace with God* (Roman 5:1). We also have in our hearts the *peace of God which surpasses all understanding* (Philippians 4:7). These are wonderful but are not the meaning here. Jesus is the peace between people, in this case Jews and Gentiles. Without Him there is no peace between alienated people,

whether they are alienated by race, religion, politics, or personality. Only Jesus is our peace. When two or more people are in Christ, they have peace with each other for He is the peace between them.

d. *Middle wall of separation broken down* - verse 14

There was actually a barrier in the temple beyond which Gentiles were not permitted upon penalty of death. People put up their own invisible walls today as well.

e. Enmity abolished - verse 15

[Jesus] *abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances*. God’s commandments and ordinances separated Jews from the Gentiles. The Jews were required to keep them but Gentiles were not. Indeed they could not keep them even if they wanted to, for they did not have access to them. As long as God required Jews to keep His commandments, they were separated from Gentiles. However, when Christ died, He fulfilled all the requirements of the law and God ceased to require their fulfillment from anyone. This is part of what Christ meant when He exclaimed exultantly from the cross, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). Since that time, God requires each person to believe and accept His Son’s death as the payment for his or her own sin. No one is justified by keeping the law even if they could keep it perfectly (Galatians 3:11).

f. *So as to create in Himself one new man* - verse 15

When Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, God brought all mankind together in Him. But even more, everyone saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ, diverse as they are, becomes one in Christ as a new humanity. Thus, there is peace because each is joined to the other. Division is gone.

g. Reconciliation - verse 16

We are reconciled to each other through the cross. Enmity is put to death.

h. Access - verses 17-18

All have access, by one Spirit, to the Father. No one is any closer or farther from God than anyone else due to culture, race, religion, or country of birth. For example, whether one is an Aborigine or aristocrat, black or white, Catholic or Baptist, American or Mongolian, whether *afar off* or *near*....*all have access by one Spirit to the Father*.

How will you practice having Jesus as your peace between you and others who are in Christ? Will you

thank God that there is no real division between you and any other believer? Are you harboring any self-made divisions you need to confess and abolish?

II. Building Together - Ephesians 2:19-22

A. New Status - Ephesians 2:19

Our new humanity gives us a new status in this world and the next. We are no longer *strangers and foreigners* but citizens of heaven with all the other saints, past, present, and future. We are part of God's family. As Jesus said, "*Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother*" (Matthew 12:50).

B. New Purpose - Ephesians 2:20-22

1. A foundation and a cornerstone - 2:20

We have a foundation, the apostles and prophets. We have a *chief cornerstone* (1 Peter 2:6-7), the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

2. A building - 2:21

The believers, the foundation, and the cornerstone become a building where all fit and grow together in harmony. The metaphor of the body changes to a building. In reality it is a temple. Just as each one of our bodies is a temple for the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), we are all being built together into a holy temple in the Lord.

3. A dwelling place of God in the Spirit - 2:22

Paul speaks personally to "*you also*" indicating that all believers are individually a part of this eternal temple which is being built. We are built into it and it is a place for God to reside.

Application

Are you so excited about being part of God's new humanity and new purpose that you want others to be in Christ with you? Will you share the good news of Jesus with someone this week? Who will you speak to and perhaps invite to Bible Study?