

OUR REDEMPTION BY CHRIST

Summary and Historical Background

Paul revealed to the Ephesian Christians in chapter one the greatness of God's plan of salvation when he told them of their precious possessions. Then he prayed for them that they might have knowledge of God, especially concerning His calling, His inheritance and His power.

In chapter two Paul develops the idea of God's power in the resurrection of Christ. Through Christ's resurrection God demonstrates His power to regenerate spiritually dead people (give them a new life with a new nature) and to reconcile them (mend broken relationships with Him and people they hated).

First, Paul shows how the resurrection of Christ is related to the regeneration of believers (2:1-10). He begins by reminding the Ephesian believers of the desperate need they had for regeneration before they were saved. Then he explains the glorious effects of Christ's resurrection on their regeneration: a new life, a new power, a new standing, and a new destiny (2:4-7). Finally, he shows that the basis of God's work is His grace which is received through faith (2:8-10).

Then Paul develops the theme of reconciliation (2:11-22). The cleavage between Jew and Gentile was as sharp and as bitter as any social cleavage today (2:11-12). The Jews held the Gentiles in contempt for their violation of the Mosaic Laws. The Gentiles hated the Jews because of their exclusiveness and intolerance of Gentile religions. But God reconciled Jews and Gentiles through Jesus Christ (2:13-18). Through the power of Christ's resurrection, He removed this enmity and joined both together to make a new man, the Body of Christ. Not only was Christ able to remove the enmity between people, but He also removed the enmity between sinners and God, providing them an open access to God the Father. Finally, this new humanity, composed of Jews and Gentiles, is treated under three figures: a nation, a family, and a temple (2:19-22).

I. Regeneration — 2:1-10

A. The Need for Regeneration — 2:1-3

Four spiritual facts show the need for all people to be regenerated.

2:1 — "Who were dead in trespasses and sins" - the first fact that shows every person is in need of regeneration; everyone is spiritually dead. Before the Ephesians were saved, they were dead, not physically, not intellectually, but spiritually. They were separated from God. They had no capacity for responding to Him. They were in a continual state of deadness as is indicated by the verb, "were." The term "trespasses" is defined as a deliberate violation of a contract, as a defiance of God's rights. The word "sins" is defined as a falling short of God's glory, as missing the target, as breaking God's law.

2:2 — "You walked according to the course of this world" - the second fact that shows the need for regeneration is the spiritual perversion of man. Gentile standards and motivations were twisted. The Ephesians walked in accordance to the standard of the world. "Walk" is a very common expression in the Bible to describe a person's conduct. The "world" is the present system of life, highly organized, but opposed to God.

"According to the prince of the power of the air" — this phrase is the first of two characteristics concerning the devil's control. First, he is the ruler of the "power of the air." The air is the outward environment in which believers live. "Air," like our expression, "It's in the air," refers to the spirit of the age. The devil produces the illusions of the world that it is filled with success and pleasure. He seeks to make people think like the world, to have the world's standards and ethics, to fulfill one's life.

"The spirit which now works in the children of disobedience" — this is the second characteristic of the devil's control. Not only is the devil the ruler of our outer environment, but he is also the ruler of our inner environment. This phrase is better translated "of the spirit." He provides and directs the inner stimulation to do evil.

2:3 — "Among whom we all had our conversation" - the third fact showing the need for regeneration is our spiritual depravity. Our sin nature is manifested in thoughts, attitudes, and acts. Paul shifts his attention from the Gentiles ("you") in vs. 1-2 to include the Jews ("we") in v. 3. The Jews had God's standards expressed clearly in Scripture, but even Jews lived lives that fulfilled their own desires and were uncontrolled by God.

"In the lusts of our flesh" — lusts can refer to things that are good or bad. The modifying phrase "of the flesh" shows that these desires are excited by our fallen nature.

"And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" — the fourth fact showing the need for regeneration is God's wrath. God's just judgment upon all people is eternal separation from Him in Hell. All of us without Christ are under God's wrath and are doomed to eternal punishment in fire.

B. The Benefits of Regeneration — 2:4-7

2:4 — "But God, who is rich in mercy" - people at their worst bring forth God at His best. The "but God" verses in the Bible often exhibit the depths of God's grace for sinners. He is a merciful God, looking at our miserable state and responding in care instead of contempt. He is a loving God, willing to give His only Son to save His enemies.

2:5-7 — "Has quickened us together with Christ" - the four benefits of regeneration begin with this statement. First, the believers are quickened (made alive) together with Christ. Up to the moment of salvation, they were spiritually dead in their sins, that is, they were separated from God. At salvation Christ's spiritual life replaced their spiritual death. They were united with God and given eternal life.

"Has raised us up together" — the second benefit of regeneration is that believers have a vital power to live their Christian life. Even as Christ was raised from the grave to walk among His people for forty days, so believers have been raised to live for God while they are alive in this world. They have a new energy supplied by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

"And made us sit together in heavenly places" — Third, believers have a new heavenly position. They are officially seated with Christ in the heavens. No longer are their lives governed by the world. Now their lives are governed by the authority and glory of the Lord in Heaven.

"That in the ages to come" — finally, believers have a new destiny in God's Eternal Kingdom. Instead of experiencing God's eternal wrath in Hell, they will experience God's extravagant riches of grace in His Kingdom. This is all made possible by His kindness to them through Christ Jesus.

C. The Basis of Regeneration — 2:8-9

2:8-9 — "For by grace" - Paul emphatically states that God's grace is the basis of salvation. Salvation is not derived from men, whether it is from their own good works or from the works of church leaders. Salvation is all of grace, so that boasting is excluded (v. 9).

"Are you saved" — the verb tense describes an act which has occurred in the past, but has continuing results.

"Through faith" — this phrase shows that faith is simply the channel by which we receive God's grace. Faith is not a work, but it is a positive response to God's Word and a reception of it (cf. Heb 11:6).

"That not of yourselves" — "that" probably does not refer to faith since "that" and "faith" in the original language are in different genders. "That" refers to the concept of salvation. The gift of God is salvation.

D. The Purpose of Regeneration — 2:10

2:10 — "For we are His workmanship" - the word for "workmanship" is only used here and in Rom 1:20 in the New Testament. In Rom 1:20, it refers to His workmanship in the material creation, but here it refers to the spiritual creation. The latter cost Him far more and thus it is His masterpiece.

"Created in Christ Jesus" — the believer has a new beginning; he is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

"Unto good works" — the believer has been created to do good works. The idea of "good" is that which is organically sound, beautiful in appearance, and morally appropriate. These works are the product of God's power ("we are His workmanship"). Believers have no right to glory in their good works, but they have the responsibility to do good works. Before salvation they practiced everything that was foul, but now they are to practice what is fair and well-pleasing to God.

"Which God has before ordained" — God is the author of the good works which He wants believers to practice. He has "before ordained" them, that is, He has "previously prepared" them for believers to practice. Believers cannot boastfully claim that their godliness is their own work; it is God who is at work in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). Believers cannot boast of their salvation by their good works. All is of God.

II. Reconciliation — 2:11-22

God not only gives believers a new spiritual life for the old, but He also mends broken relationships by enabling them to come back into fellowship with others and with God. This part of chapter two discusses Jesus Christ's work of reconciliation, discussing especially the human aspects of it. The Jews and the Gentiles were completely estranged from each other. The Jews separated themselves from the Gentiles in the cities where they lived. The Jews demanded certain privileges from the Gentiles (i.e., the right to send gold to their temple in Jerusalem, the right not to appear in court on the Sabbath, and the right to self-government in their own part of the city). They refused to participate in pagan religious ceremonies and even refused to partake of a common meal with the Gentiles. The Gentiles naturally resented Jewish separatism and accused the Jews of ritual murder, atheism, and every kind of indecency (worshipping an ass' head). Greek city authorities used every stratagem and loophole possible to evade imperial laws protecting the Jews. In fact, Herod the Great had to appeal to Augustus in 14 B.C. to insure that the Jews at Ephesus were accorded their rights (the Jewish temple contribution had been confiscated by the city authorities). But Jesus Christ came to change this hatred and contempt into unity, brotherhood, and love.

A. Problem — 2:11-12

2:11-12 — "Wherefore, remember" - Paul calls upon the Ephesian Christians to continue to remember the great reconciliation that had been made for them. He describes their former state with five negatives.

"Without Christ" — they had no Christ, no connection with the coming Deliverer of mankind.

"Being aliens" — they were aliens to the commonwealth of Israel. They had no part in the present government or the future Kingdom of God.

"Strangers from the covenants of promise" — the covenants that God made with the patriarchs contained various promises of blessing that were vitally united to the promise of the Messiah. The Gentiles had no share in the Messiah or in the future blessings of Israel.

These last two descriptions of the Gentiles would remind the Ephesian readers of the three classes of free adults in a Greek city state. First, there were the full citizens who could vote, hold office, and maintain complete political control. Second, there were the metics, or resident aliens. These were tightly regulated and had no voice in city government, but usually had some personal rights (fair trial) and had self-government within their own group of resident aliens. Finally, there were the strangers, wanderers, and refugees. They had the fewest rights of all. The strangers had to rely on a god to insure fair treatment. The two descriptions, "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel" and "strangers from the covenants of promise," would suggest to a Gentile that in God's economy, he had no rights or privileges in His Kingdom.

"Having no hope" — the present tense in this verb shows the continual absence of any hope. They not only lacked a basis for hope, but they felt that lack of hope.

"Without God" — this phrase literally says they were "atheists." One of the common charges of pagans against Jews and Christians was that they were atheists because the God they worshipped had no image. But it is the Gentiles who were really the atheists. Three ideas can be seen in this phrase. (1) The Gentiles were ignorant of the true God. (2) They were rejecters of the true God. (3) They were forsaken by the true God.

B. Solution — 2:13-18

2:13 — "Were afar off are made nigh" - the Gentiles were made nigh to God and also to God's people by the blood of Christ. The phrase "are made nigh" was used by rabbis to describe a proselyte's entry into the community of Israel. Christ's bloody sacrifice on the cross made the Gentiles members of the new theocracy.

2:14-15 — "Has broken down the middle wall of partition" - Christ broke down the barrier that separated the Jews from the Gentiles. The middle wall of partition figuratively refers to the Mosaic ordinances which commanded Jews to maintain a necessary (though temporary) separation from the world. This wall was epitomized by the wall in the Temple area which prevented the Gentiles from going into the actual area of sacrifice. On this wall was a warning that any Gentile who passed beyond this wall would be killed.

"Having abolished in his flesh...the law" — Christ broke down the barrier of the law by abolishing it (making it of no effect, rendering it inoperative). He did this by his complete fulfillment of the law in active obedience having a sinless life and in sacrificial obedience by His death on the cross for our sins.

2:16 — The cross reconciles sinners to God by removing the sin that barred fellowship with Him.

2:17 — Not only was reconciliation effected, it was proclaimed throughout the world to both Gentiles (those afar off) and Jews (those near). The preaching was done through the apostles.

2:18 — "We both have access by one Spirit" - the reconciliation is a permanent continuing fact. We have continual access to God by the Holy Spirit. This "access" can refer to the right of a citizen to have an audience with his king. In this verse it refers to the access of believers to their heavenly Father.

C. Result — 2:19-22

2:19 — "Are no more strangers" - Paul uses the figure of a nation with people from many countries who have become fellow citizens to show the unity between the Jews and Gentiles.

"The household of God" — Paul now switches to the figure of a household (a family) to depict the union of Jews and Gentiles.

2:20-22 — "A holy temple" - The final figure used to describe the unity of Jews and Gentiles is that of a beautiful temple for God. The Ephesian Christians were acquainted with the Temple of Artemis (Diana). Its beauty was celebrated all over the world. Engraved on its walls were city resolutions granting citizenship to someone who had served the city (by selling grain at half price in a famine, representing the city before a king). Paul lifts their eyes however, from the Temple of Artemis to the Temple of God. The Ephesian believers had done no great work for God. They were only strangers (refugees) or foreigners (resident aliens). But through Christ they were made citizens equal to the rest of the people of God, indeed, they were part of God's own family (v. 19).

"Are built upon the foundation" — the foundation was the New Testament revelation of the apostles and prophets (the prophets here refer to New Testament prophets). They were the medium by which the New Testament books were given.

"Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone" — the chief cornerstone stood at the extreme corner of the building; all the weight of the building was on it and it bound all the other stones together. On this stone the stability of the Temple depended. Jesus Christ holds the "holy temple" together. Shortly after

18 A.D. an earthquake shook Ephesus and much repair had to be done to the buildings of the city, but the heavenly Temple has an unshakable foundation.

"In whom all the building fitly framed together" — instead of the edicts of citizenship being inscribed on the walls, the citizens of the New Jerusalem became part of the Temple. The parts of the Temple were harmoniously fitted together to make it holy and beautiful.