

# Ephesians – God’s Roadmap



## #4 Your Travelling Companions - Ephesians 2:11-22

### Intro

Now that Coronavirus restrictions have eased here in Melbourne, I wonder what your “before and after” photos, look like?



For example... how’s your hairstyle now? Maybe this week past it’s changed dramatically for the better!

Or, maybe your pet is suddenly again recognizable again.

Perhaps your gym workouts have made a difference.

Is your favourite café is looking livelier?

### Before and after following Christ

In Chapter 2 of The Letter to the Ephesians, we get “**before**” and “**after**” images of Christians; those who **put their faith in Jesus Christ**.

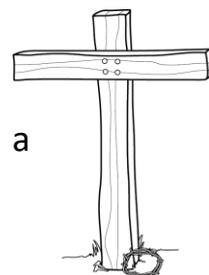
**Before** becoming Christians, the Apostle Paul says that his readers...

<sup>12</sup> ... **were** separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12)

**After** becoming Christians, in verse 19, Paul says now...

<sup>19</sup>...you are **no longer** strangers and aliens... you **are** citizens with the saints **and also** members of God’s household

The **event** that makes the difference, the axis around which the changes occur, is the **death of Jesus** upon the **cross** for sins. The source of the new “after” life of a



Christian, he says, is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:7, 1:19,20, 2:4-5).

The **first half** of chapter 2 seems to address how God’s grace impacts the **individual**. Verses 11-22 go further to speak of how the cross of Christ impacts the **corporate dimension** of our lives – our **relationships**.

Verses **1-10** picture the “before” and “after” of our **vertical relationship** (people and God), and **verses 11-22** picture the **horizontal** – our relationships with each other.

## Before

Let’s look at Paul’s appraisal of the relationships of his readers before they were Christians.

### Ephesians 2:11-22

Before following Christ vs 12

Alienated from God (see 4:18)

Alienated from “Israel”

In conflict with one other

**BEFORE**

Paul uses the word “**alienated**”.<sup>1</sup> It can be translated “separated” or “estranged”. It’s used of our **separation from God** in Ephesians 4:18, but here in 2:12 it refers to **our separation from one another**. Paul is “speaking” directly to Gentiles (non-Jews) in Christian churches, while he knows that Jewish converts are “listening in” too (see verses 11, 17).<sup>2</sup> In those days, Jews considered Gentiles to be...

- “far away” from God,
- “homeless”, unfit for God’s household,
- “stateless”, not citizens of God’s kingdom,
- “hopeless”, and even
- “godless”.

It’s **hard** for us to **imagine such enmity between** these **two** groups.

But even a **brief biblical survey** reminds us that Israel was formed by God to be the **agency of blessing** to all nations. God set apart a “people” by grace to be the bearer of grace and peace to the world (see Gen.

<sup>1</sup> *Apallotrioo* (Gk) = to alienate, estrange, exclude, see Eph. 4:18

<sup>2</sup> While addressed to Christians in Ephesus, the Letter circulated to others in Asia Minor

12:1-3, Isa. 42:1-6; 49:6, Micah 4:1-2, Matt. 28:19, Rom. 4:1-18, Gal. 3:8, Rev. 15:4).

**But**, Israel...

- **forgot her vocation** long ago
- **twisted her privilege** into favouritism, and
- by first century times **heartily despised**, even detested the people of other nations:
  - calling them “dogs”, “uncircumcised”, “sinners”<sup>3</sup>
  - not eating or drinking with them<sup>4</sup>
  - following religious laws that perpetuated discord<sup>5</sup>
  - barring them from entry to the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup>

No wonder Paul imagines the Jews and Gentiles of the churches **before** they were Christians as **divided** by a huge “wall” of “hostility” in vs. 14.



Did you know that the **foundation stone** for what’s often called “Trump’s wall” between the USA and Mexico was first laid in **1848**! Paul too, was dealing with a **long-standing division** between two peoples. His concern is to show that those in Christ must see that such **divisions have no place** in the Church.<sup>7</sup> Jesus died to make peace (vs. 15).

The **cross** of Christ, says Paul in verses 14-16, **brings down** the walls. It **dissolves disunity, cures community, and heals disharmony**.

Paul writes...

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. Matt. 15:26, Eph. 2:11, Gal. 2:15, Luke 5:30. Gentiles alienated Jews too, but Paul’s purpose here is to convince all of God’s inclusion of Gentile Christians in full participation

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Gal. 2:12

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Eph. 2:15, Matt. 15:6

<sup>6</sup> With a threat of death as punishment. P91 Stott

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Acts 6:1 shows how early such tensions were evident in the churches

<sup>14</sup> For he (Christ) is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups (in this case Jews and Gentiles) into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. <sup>15</sup> He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself **one new humanity** in place of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.



God's grace is **not only** unmerited and undeserved favour for an **individual's need** for salvation from sin and death. More than this, by God's grace...

- **alienation** gives way to **reconciliation**,
- **hostility** gives way to **peace**,
- **differences** that divide, give way to **unity**.

God's grand plan involves making a **new humanity** (2:15). The Church is God's agent of reconciliation in the world today (Eph. 1:10, 2 Cor. 5:18).

In light of this, let's re-examine how Paul pictures the "**after**" of becoming a Christian in verses 16-19. He writes...

### **Ephesians 2:11-22**

After following Christ vss 16-19  
United with one another  
Citizens of a "holy" community  
"Siblings" in God's household of peace

**AFTER**

<sup>16</sup> (God was reconciling two conflicted and separated) groups to Himself in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. <sup>17</sup> So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; <sup>18</sup> for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then **you** (plural) are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God

Now, in Christ, Paul sees those once far away as now **brought near** to God and to their former enemies. Those once homeless should now be **siblings in God's harmonious household**. Those once stateless are fellow

**citizens** under God’s benevolent reign. Those once enemies can experience together the “shalom”<sup>8</sup> or **peace** of God.

His statement in 2:18 would have shocked Jewish converts at first, that “...through (Christ) **both of us** (Jew and Gentile) have access in one Spirit to the Father”. He makes his point crystal clear to Jewish converts later in Ephesians 3:6, saying, “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

### How should we respond today?

It’s clear in Ephesians chapter 2 that the Apostle Paul applies the implications of the cross of Christ to a particular 1<sup>st</sup> Century example of enmity between two groups. But how does it apply to churches in our time? Paul’s theology of grace is **widely applicable** to many of our divisions and long-standing relationship difficulties today.



It is vital that Christians today see the cross as **God’s instrument for breaking down the walls that divide**. We must see the Church as God’s instrument and agent of **grace and peace**.

We can legitimately **insert** into the text **contemporary examples** of divisions and discord that were in our disposition before we were “in Christ”. For example,

- **racist attitudes** should not be carried over into our relationships in Church upon becoming a Christian<sup>9</sup> but be transformed by God’s grace<sup>10</sup>,
- **unforgiveness** and **hatred** should not be harbored or left unresolved if at all possible. Instead, vengeance should give way to reconciliation and peace with the help of God.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Eirene* in Greek is closely related to *shalom* in Hebrew here, not merely the absence of conflict, but the positive addition of wellbeing and future blessing

<sup>9</sup> Or if harboured by life-long Christians without revision

<sup>10</sup> Gal. 3:27,28

<sup>11</sup> Mark 11:25

Even a cursory glance at 2020 headlines shows how prone people are to taking sides on issues; entrenching our attitudes with **bipolar positions** and as a result building walls that divide. Sadly, Christians are just as susceptible of **sowing discord** and examples abound!

Here then, are **two lessons** we should consider in light of Paul's "before" and "after" pictures of those Christians in ancient times:

1. **Firstly**, don't **stop reading** Ephesians 2 at verse 10. Don't be tempted to say to God "thank you very much!" as if God's grace is **mere personal assurance of heaven**, or an aid to **individual** piety.<sup>12</sup> If we read up to verse 10 and close the Bible, we will **miss** God's design for the Church; for our **corporate** life, our relationships. Paul says, Christ is **our** peace (14), God was **making** peace (15), and he **preached** peace (17). Jesus said, "Blessed are the peace-makers".<sup>13</sup> God's desire is that we be a **new society of peace** that displays His grace to all. Jesus said to his followers, "By this (by your love for one another) everyone will know that you are my disciples..." (John 13:35).
2. **Secondly**, let's not to **bring** into our relationships in the Church attitudes and actions that **divide** and **alienate** others. Ask God to bring to light such divisive attitudes and prejudices that might need renovating or removing by God's Spirit. Leave discord behind at your **prayer-desk** in the morning before you leave the house. Ask God's Spirit to help you form new habits of grace, mercy and peace.

Making peace is never as simple as a change of theology. But Paul's theological assertions are strong motivation to surrender our former ways and seek the new life God offers for our relationships. Consider what **the "before" picture** might look like in your situation. Have you laid at the **foot of the cross** those attitudes that alienate other?

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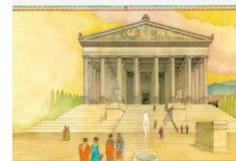
<sup>12</sup> Note, however, that Paul's "you" in verses 1-10 is also plural, presuming a community is reading

<sup>13</sup> Matt. 5:9

Paul adds one more “*after*” **photo** to his message. In verses 20-22 he pictures Christians together united by God’s grace as a **temple**...

<sup>20</sup> built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. <sup>14</sup>

As Paul dictated this letter from prison, his Gentile readers new of the impressive **temple of Artemis** (a great wonder of the world) just outside Ephesus. Yet that temple served self-centred pursuits and its glory



was passing. The temple of Herod the Great in Jerusalem would come to mind for Paul’s Jewish readers, yet it restricted access to women and

peasants, and barred non-Jews altogether from participating in God’s blessings. Instead, Paul pictures a “temple” not made of inanimate materials, but of **living stones** <sup>15</sup> fashioned by grace and established upon God’s foundations – forming an ever-growing abode of peace & inclusion for **all** who have faith.



John Stott wrote,

“...there is a new temple, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. It is the new society, God’s redeemed people scattered throughout the inhabited world. They are God’s home on earth. They will also be God’s home in heaven, for the building is not yet complete. It grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” In the end, says Stott, a voice will declare from God’s throne, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with people.”<sup>16</sup>

Steve Webster | St Michaels North Carlton | 2020

<sup>14</sup> The First Letter of Peter likens Christians to “living stones” (2:5)

<sup>15</sup> 1 Peter 2:5 has the same image

<sup>16</sup> Stott p.110, referring to Rev. 21:1-5