Ephesians 2 Bible study

Ephesians 2:1-22. 3 sessions of about 45 minutes, or one longer session. For small groups and personal study.

Verses 1 to 10 describe people made alive with Christ by God's grace, through faith rather than works, and created for good works. Verses 11 to 22 describe Gentiles once far off brought near through Christ, who reconciles Jews and Gentiles to God in one body. The chapter moves from death to life and from alienation to belonging. Read personal salvation and the formation of a shared household together.

READ TOGETHER: EPHESIANS 2:1-22

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you used to walk when you conformed to
the ways of this world and of the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit who is now at work in the
sons of disobedience. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, fulfilling the cravings of our
flesh and indulging its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature children of wrath. 4 But
because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we
were dead in our trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved! 6 And God raised us up with Christ
and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages He
might display the surpassing riches of His grace, demonstrated by His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
8 For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of
God, 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ
Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance as our way of life. 11 Therefore remember
that formerly you who are Gentiles in the flesh and called uncircumcised by the so-called
circumcision (that done in the body by human hands)— 12 remember that at that time you were
separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of
the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once
were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace,
who has made the two one and has torn down the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing in His
flesh the law of commandments and decrees. He did this to create in Himself one new man out of the
two, thus making peace 16 and reconciling both of them to God in one body through the cross, by
which He extinguished their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and
peace to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19
Therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members
of God’s household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself
as the cornerstone. 21 In Him the whole building is fitted together and grows into a holy temple in the
Lord. 22 And in Him you too are being built together into a dwelling place for God in His Spirit.

Scripture from the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain.

BACKGROUND

Read past the familiar verses

Verses 8 to 10 are often studied on their own. Begin at verse 1 to see the problem and the action attributed to God. Continue through verse 22 to see the community created through Christ. The two halves are not competing topics.

Tyndale's note on 2:10 puts the order plainly: "Good works are the result, not the cause, of salvation." Read that beside the exclusion of boasting in verse 9. Paul both denies that works earn salvation and describes good works as part of the life God creates.

Gentiles brought near

Verses 11 and 12 ask Gentile readers to remember their former alienation from Israel's covenant privileges. The turning point in verse 13 is Christ's blood. The reconciliation described is both with God and between the two groups, not merely a general feeling of social harmony.

Tyndale's notes on 2:14 and 16 connect peace with God and peace between Jews and Gentiles. The chapter ends with citizenship, household, and temple images. Follow each image before applying it to a contemporary group. The passage gives no license for contempt toward Jewish people.

TWO CHANGES, ONE ACT OF GRACE

Make two before-and-after lists. Then trace what Christ does in each.

Dead in sins (2:1-3)

Paul describes disobedience and the powers and desires shaping the old way of life. Verse 3 includes all of us. Read the paragraph as shared need rather than a way of claiming one ethnic group is morally superior.

Made alive with Christ (2:4-7)

God's mercy and love introduce the change. The repeated language of being with Christ connects new life, resurrection, and a place in the heavenly realms. The text directs gratitude toward God's action.

Not by works, for good works (2:8-10)

Faith does not turn salvation into a wage. Nor does the rejection of earned salvation make conduct irrelevant. Verse 10 gives good works their place as the life prepared for those created in Christ.

Far off, brought near (2:11-18)

The groups in view are Jews and Gentiles. Christ makes peace through the cross, reconciling both to God and giving both access to the Father by one Spirit. Do not replace this specific claim with a vague message that differences do not matter.

A household and a dwelling (2:19-22)

The outsiders are now fellow citizens and members of a household. The building grows into a holy temple with Christ as cornerstone. The shared life of the community belongs to the chapter's account of salvation.

SESSION 1 OF 3

Grace creates a new life

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Follow the order from need to mercy to good works.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What describes the former way of life in verses 1 to 3, and whom does Paul include?

2. List what God does in verses 4 to 10. What reasons or purposes does Paul give?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. How do verses 8 and 9 rule out boasting about salvation?

4. Why does verse 10 belong beside the statement that salvation is not by works?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

5. Where are you tempted to treat religious effort as a way of earning acceptance?

6. Choose a concrete good work you can do in gratitude rather than as a claim to superiority.

SESSION 2 OF 3

Peace through the cross

Read Ephesians 2:11-18. Read reconciliation with God and reconciliation between groups together.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What are Gentile readers told to remember in verses 11 and 12?

2. What actions and changes are attributed to Christ in verses 13 to 18?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Who are the two groups in verse 14, and why does identifying them matter?

4. How does verse 18 connect Father, Son, and Spirit with the shared access described?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

5. What practice in your church could imply that some believers are less entitled to belong?

6. What change could give a quieter or less familiar member meaningful participation rather than a token welcome?

SESSION 3 OF 3

Built together

Read Ephesians 2:19-22. Consider what the citizenship, household, and temple images ask a group to see.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. List the three pictures of belonging in these verses.

2. What is the place of Christ, and what does the passage say about being built together?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. How does the household image answer the earlier language of strangers and foreigners?

4. Why is a collection of isolated spiritual successes too small a summary of this chapter?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

5. What shared responsibility would make belonging more tangible in your group?

6. Pray for a community shaped by grace, peace, and mutual care rather than only individual achievement.

ONE-SESSION PATH

Ephesians 2 in one evening

Read all of Ephesians 2:1-22. About 45 to 60 minutes.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. Read the whole chapter and make a before-and-after list for verses 1 to 10.

2. Make a second list for verses 11 to 22. Who are the people in view?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. How does verse 10 keep the rejection of earned salvation from becoming a rejection of good works?

4. What does Christ do to reconcile the two groups to God?

5. What do the household and temple images add to the chapter's account of salvation?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. Choose one act of gratitude and one practice of shared belonging for this week.

7. How can the group encourage those responses without turning them into a new standard for earning acceptance?

FOR THE LEADER

- Session 1 has a sequence the text itself supplies: dead in sins, made alive by mercy, saved by grace through faith, created for good works. Keep the order visible without adding a full theory of the timing of conversion.
- In session 2, the two groups are Jews and Gentiles. Their reconciliation through Christ is the starting point. Contemporary examples can follow, but should not erase the original people or encourage stereotypes about them.
- The wall illustration is symbolic. Tyndale's note on 2:14 discusses the temple boundary as background for the image; the artwork does not reconstruct that actual wall.
- In session 3, notice that the building is being fitted and built together. Invite responsibilities such as listening, hospitality, and practical help. The chapter is about shared access to God, not conformity to a leader's tastes.
- If discussion turns to disputes about grace or the law, return to the statements both parts make explicitly. Allow questions without treating a different interpretation of a detail as evidence someone does not belong.

WHERE CHRISTIANS READ IT DIFFERENTLY

What does the gift in verse 8 refer to?

Readers discuss whether the phrase points especially to faith or to salvation by grace through faith as a whole. The immediate point shared by these readings is that salvation is not our achievement and gives no ground for boasting. Tyndale's note on 2:8-9 emphasizes trust in Christ rather than personal merit. Do not use this brief phrase alone to settle every question about conversion.

What law is abolished in verse 15?

Some readings focus on the commandments that distinguished Jews from Gentiles; others understand the Mosaic law more broadly as a covenantal order fulfilled in Christ. Both must explain Paul's stated purpose of creating one new humanity and reconciling both to God. This verse does not mean that love or ethical obedience has become irrelevant; verse 10 already speaks of good works.

Does reconciliation mean erasing every difference?

The text declares one body and equal access to the Father through Christ. It does not say that every cultural difference disappears or that Jewish people should be despised. Apply the passage by refusing hostility and exclusion, not by demanding that everyone adopt the preferences of the dominant group.

SOURCES

Ephesians 2, Berean Standard Bible. Berean Bible. Public domain. Full primary passage for the questions, chapter map, and interpretive discussion.

Tyndale Open Study Notes, Ephesians 2. Tyndale House Publishers. CC BY-SA 4.0. Notes on 2:1-10, 8-10, 11-22, 14-16, and 19-22; grace, good works, reconciliation, and the shared dwelling.

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