

In Christ
Ephesians 2
Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening Question (get everyone involved in discussion):

- What is one item that you have on display in your home or office, about which you are happy to tell people?
- Transition: One of the things we see in this week's study is how much God wants his kindness to be on display.

Read Ephesians 2:1-3 and then discuss the following.

- Remember the high note that Paul left off with at the end of chapter 1 (last week's discussion)—as he talked about all the wonderful spiritual blessings we have received in Christ. Why do you think he now takes such a dismal tone in these verses? What is he trying to prevent?
- Who is Paul speaking to when he says, "As for you," and later, "All of us also?" (Leaders: he is speaking of his Gentile readers and then his fellow Jewish believers, to make the point that there is no exception to what he is saying).
- Paul seems to want to remind us of our desperate, helpless state before God intervened in Christ. Elaborate on the following terms, used here by Paul, and what they mean in this context:
 - Dead in your transgressions and sins
 - When you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient
 - Gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts
 - By nature deserving of wrath
- Can you see how these words are true of you, or are they hard to accept? Why?

Read Ephesians 2:4-10 and then discuss the following.

- Paul's tone changes in v. 4, as he returns to a jubilant declaration of our new reality. What reasons does Paul give for why God has now "made us alive with Christ?" (Leaders: prompts are below if you need them)
 - Because of his great love for us
 - Because God is rich in mercy
 - He wants to show the incomparable riches of his grace
 - He expresses kindness
- How do these descriptions of God's action toward us move or encourage you? Are any of them new or surprising insights?
- Just based on these verses, how would you define "grace?"
- What do you think it means, that "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus?" (v. 6). (Leaders: Pastor Josh's explanation is below, but only use it if necessary).
 - "The thought is that by Jesus' righteous life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection, he has rightfully earned his place, seated on a heavenly throne at the right hand of God, where he is now. But God has chosen to give us what Jesus rightfully earned—that high status, position, seated on thrones in the heavenly presence of God. And even though our current state is still a fallen one, our eternal enjoyment of that high status is so certain that Paul can speak of it as if we are already seated there with him."

- According to these verses, what part have we contributed to our own rescue?
- According to v. 9, why is it so important that we understand our rescue as a gift of grace?
- What hope or excitement does v. 7 give you for the future? Why? What does it say about what God enjoys displaying?

There is a very practical reason why Paul describes our being made alive in Christ, by grace, through faith—and it has to do with human relationships. Read vv. 11-22 and discuss the following.

- Note that the word “therefore” in v. 11 connects the preceding (vv. 1-10) to the present argument. Why does Paul want his Gentile readers (including us) to be reminded of their desperate state, and of God’s gracious act in Christ?
- According to vv. 14-16, what was one major purpose for which Jesus went to the cross?
- What two kinds of reconciliation did Jesus accomplish in the cross (v. 16)?
- Why was there a “dividing wall of hostility” between Gentiles and Jews?
- What “dividing walls of hostility” are still active in our community and world today?
- Pastor Josh spent a great deal of time Sunday talking about how we often look to something we have achieved to give us standing before God—which Paul debunks in vv. 1-10. Josh also argued that when we find our validity or justification in anything other than what Jesus has done, it creates (or perpetuates) walls of hostility.
 - How does this work?
 - Are you comfortable sharing any examples of how you have seen this play out personally?
- Paul’s over-arching argument in this chapter is that the radical unity described in vv. 14-18 cannot happen without understanding the radical grace described in vv. 1-10. In other words, ***only radical grace produces radical unity.***
 - What is the relationship? How does a realization of God’s grace level the playing field, so that true unity is possible?
 - How can you get this message of radical grace worked into your heart so that it makes a change in your relationships?

Read Ephesians 2:19-22 and discuss the following.

- What do we see here as the end result of different groups and classes of people understanding God’s grace in Christ? What metaphors here describe our new reality? Do you think we’re experiencing this kind of “living temple” here in our church community?
- On Sunday, Pastor Josh asked a few questions for reflection. Have you come up with answers that you would be willing to share, so that we can pray for you in them? The questions are below:
 - Is there some aspect of your life that you have looked to as a measure of your worth—rather than the grace of God—that may be leading you to be motivated by pride?
 - Is there some relationship, or some kind of people that you’ve cut yourself off from or looked down at?
 - How can you let God’s grace move you to start crossing those dividing lines and pursuing unified relationships?

Prayer:

- Pray for one another regarding the answers just shared.
- What other needs exist in your group? Spend some time praying for them.