

God's Work in Us – Pt. 2

Ephesians 2:11-22

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



The term “selfie” is ubiquitous in our cultural landscape. However, it wasn’t until 2010 that phones were equipped with front-facing cameras that were purposely designed to take “selfies.” Sure, we had figured out how to hold a camera out and snap a picture of ourselves or to use the timer feature so we could get a group photo. But to just “take a selfie” had never really been in our language until 2010. And with it, there was a catalytic change to our already established sense of individualism and self-importance. Before 2010, someone who took multiple photos of themselves would have been seen as vain and self-obsessed. Post 2010, this is now seen as normal behavior. We must be cautious here because the “selfie” didn’t start something new in humanity, especially Western humanity. No, it accelerated something that was already there. The rise of the individual. In the West, we are obsessed with the individual. Individual rights and freedoms. Individual expression and autonomy. This can all be traced back to Renaissance philosophy and post-enlightenment thinking. Again, we are obsessed with the individual. But then we will hear Paul’s words in Ephesians, and he will talk profoundly of the changes that we have undergone as individuals and as a community. It is “I and we” language. This should cause us to pause as it is. But then, when we really look at what Paul is talking about, he reminds us that we aren’t even responsible for those changes; God is. This is an even more difficult reflection point for us, isn’t it? Even in our spiritual lives, we know in the back of our heads that God is empowering change and growth, and yet we are so tempted to say, “Look how I’ve grown!” And yes, growth is personal, but it is only because of God. What we are about to explore in this passage is the reality that our salvation and our growth are all about God. That God is the hero of the story. **That God’s work is a reflection of God and not us.**

1. “Therefore”

a. What is the “therefore” there for?

- i. Remember, Paul writes in the Hellenistic style of rhetoric that was common in his day. That means that he routinely builds his arguments in a linear fashion that often flows: Point A + Point B = Conclusion C. In this way, it is very algebraic in nature. So, if you understand basic algebra, Paul becomes much easier to read and understand. That doesn’t mean that he is always easy, as he also slips back and forth from a Greek style of argumentation to Hebrew poetry and theological concepts.
- ii. **Greek & Hebrew** → Paul is writing the believers in Ephesus and they are predominately Gentile. However, Paul opened up his letter with a Hebrew style poem in 1:3-14. This

either means one of three things. First, that they were familiar with this style of writing, and it wasn't limited to Jewish audiences. Second, there were enough Jewish believers in this large metropolitan city that they could unpack and explain it. Or, third, that the information presented was clear enough that even the Gentile audience could understand what Paul was expressing without needing to understand the rich tradition it flowed out of. The reality to these three possibilities is that it is most likely that all three are true of the Ephesian context.

1. **It is also why we today as a modern audience can understand what Paul expresses in 1:3-14 without understanding the rich tradition of this style of poetry.**
 2. Through Paul's command of Greek and Hebrew culture, language, and theology we can come to see why he was so influential and used by God in this era of the life of the church. He was truly able to communicate to all people the hope of Jesus!
- iii. As we continue to grow in our understanding of how Paul writes, or as scholars like to say, the Pauline rhetorical style, we have come to see that we don't have to be a scholar to understand Paul. Instead, we just need to know what to look for.
1. If Paul flows in a linear logical fashion, then we should be on the lookout for any transition words or phrases such as "therefore" and "for this reason." These will be key transition points in Paul's logic that will help us track what he is saying.
 2. We have already heard a "for this reason" back in 1:15. It was Paul's transition point after he laid a theological foundation of God's character and nature in vv.3-14. The "for this reason" then flowed into his praise and thanksgiving for the Ephesian believers because of God's character that was at work within them. It also gives the foundation for his prayer for them.
 3. **We come to another key transition in 2:11, this "therefore" transitions to the big conclusion of the nature of our salvation.**
- b. **Saved from and Saved for.**
- i. What you have been saved from. → We have been saved from sin and rebellion.
 1. 2:1 – You "were" dead in your trespasses. → Again, Paul is continually driving home the reality of what was and what now is. Transformation has occurred and is occurring.
 2. In this section we hear that we were saved from division and hostility.
 - ii. **What you are saved for. → Righteousness and to bear Christlike fruit.**
 1. Everything so far has been building to what Paul is about to say in vv. 13-22. We are something entirely new and we belong to a new people in Christ.
 2. When I live as if I've been saved from something, I start to live with less of a sin-avoidance mentality and more of a God-glorifying mentality.
 3. **One of the key questions in growing into maturity is asking, "How do I honor God in this situation?"**

2. "One new man."

- a. To make the point even clearer, Paul explicitly tells them that they are now a new people. There is no mistaking at this point in the letter. Their identity is to be seen solely in light of what Christ has done for them.

- i. V.11 - **The purpose of Christ's work for human salvation is not limited to the giving of new life to individual men and women, previously dead in sin, as the last section has described.** Chapter 1 has given hints that it goes beyond this, and the present section now shows that it involves the bringing of those individuals, whatever their race or background, into unity in the people of God. In this respect it involves the greatest transformation of situation for the Gentiles, and this section, like verses 1–10, begins by showing what was the condition of Gentiles in the past. **As John Stott puts it we have 'the portrait of an alienated humanity', then, 'the portrait of the peace-making Christ' and lastly 'the portrait of God's new society'.¹**
- b. This isn't a theoretical newness either. It is to affect the very fabric of their community.
 - i. Not only can it be said that Christ brings peace. *He is our peace.* As men and women are brought to be in him, and continue to live in him, they find peace with God, and so also a meeting place and concord with one another, whatever may have been their divisions of race, color, class or creed before. He came for this purpose (Luke 2:14), to be the Prince of peace, and indeed in such terms the prophets had foretold his coming (Isa. 9:6–7; 53:5; Mic. 5:5; Hag. 2:9; Zech. 9:10). By his coming and supremely by his cross, he *has made us both one.* The Greek says literally that 'he has made both things into one thing' (later, in v. 15, the personal is used). The organization of Judaism and that of the Gentile world no longer stand apart as before. Divisions and distinctions no longer exist as far as the standing of any before God is concerned. God has made a way for the divided to become one (cf. John 10:16; 17:11; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13).²
 - ii. **Barth notes, "In Christ, our existence here-and-now is so radically related to God's beyond, and our entire known existence is brought so fully into the light of his eternal future, that the distinctions and antitheses that define our current existence are revealed to be conditional and provisional."³**
 - 1. What Barth is getting at in this quote is that everything else that we see that divides us or defines us is based upon conditions that we did not control or are totally provision based upon our circumstances. But what we have been made into in Christ is something that does not change with our physical location nor into eternity. It is in every way permanent and binding.
- c. **Our "new man" status is permanent and binding: Let's ask –**
 - i. **Is there anything in my life that is more important to my identity and security than what Jesus has done for me?**
 - 1. What are the things that we look towards to define us?
 - a. Politics, family, careers, degrees, hobbies, parts of our personalities or even personality tests, finances, relationships, entertainment, etc.
 - 2. How do these things not only define us, but provide us with a level of security?
 - a. I.e., "I'm ok as long as I have..."
 - i. This doesn't mean that it wouldn't hurt to lose something on that list. We're not robots without feelings or convictions. But it does

¹ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 86.

² Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 89.

³ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, ed. R. David Nelson, trans. Ross M. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 140.

mean that we can lose these things and not become lost or hopeless.

- b. It also means that we do not look to these things to provide what they never could provide in the first place.

ii. **In what ways are we promoting hostility instead of peace and unity?**

- 1. We do this when we allow anything outside of Christ and essential to the faith drive a wedge between us and cause unresolved conflict.
- 2. This is not a call towards some odd or otherworldly “peace” that comes off as eerie or delusional. It is instead a call to sobriety and maturity. A willingness to recognize that we are different people, with different lived experiences, and different perspectives, so we are going to have differences of opinions and convictions.

a. **I.e., Unity does not equal uniformity.**

- 3. This means we are not to play the same games nor adopt the same posture as the world around us. Instead, we are give an example of a better way of patience, respect, and gentleness through conflict.
- 4. We are also not to allow anything that is secondary become primary and with that, be taken captive by vain ideas and tossed back and forth.

3. Living as Exiles

- a. When we talk about being exiles, we must understand why we are exiles.
 - i. **We are not exiles because we have somehow grown discontent with the way things are or how the world around us is going.** Too often in Christian circles we appeal to the “good old days” as if we are to return to those days. Yes, there very well might be parts of what was that were noble, lovely, and true. It is ok for our hearts to long for those things. But we must also have the maturity to know that there were plenty of parts of what was that weren’t noble, lovely, or true. And our call is not to return to what was in our recent past, but a call to what was in Eden before the fall.
 - ii. **We are exiles because we have been made into something new in Christ.** This means that we are not looking to what was, but what is and what will be. It means that our old ways of thinking, acting, and relating to one another are now different because of Christ. We were captivated by this world before, but now we are captivated by Christ.
- b. Paul and Peter agree on this idea of being exiles and what has transformed us into an exilic people.
 - i. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.
 - 1. In Philippians 2:1–3 and 4:2 Paul had to speak against divisions due to personal rivalries, and in 1 Corinthians 1 and 3, against the danger of breaking up into sects for the sake of loyalty to honored leaders rather than to Christ. Here, he has had in mind the Jewish-Gentile animosities that in earlier days threatened to make two churches instead of one, and now to Gentile Christians, he says—what many Jewish Christians before had been loath to accept—you *also are built together into this holy temple, this dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*⁴

⁴ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 96.

- c. **1 Pet. 2:9-11** ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.
- d. Peter is really helpful for us to understand the nature of exile:
 - i. Peter closed the opening section by reminding the group of Christians that he is writing to about their identity change.
 - ii. **⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (2:9-10)**
 - iii. Peter is writing to a group of people with pastoral authority to teach, encourage, and even correct them.
 - 1. **Peter writes to give these Christians hope, consolation, and encouragement by explaining their new identity in Christ and how even suffering is an integral part of that identity.** ⁵
 - iv. Who is he writing to? → Christians who are suffering for their allegiance to Christ.
 - 1. **Slander and malicious talk undermined their relationships with associates and family, threatened their honor in the community, and possibly jeopardized their livelihood.**
 - 2. The issues of how to maintain a vital Christian faith in such circumstances and how to respond to unjust treatment pressed upon them. ⁶
- e. As Peter begins the second section of his letter, he will move to the application phases of the idea he just unpacked in 1:1-2:10.
 - i. Though it is an oversimplification, it may be said that 2:11–5:11 gives specific application to the general teaching of 1:1–2:10. ⁷
 - ii. By using the word **beloved** Peter reminds his readers that though he exhorts them as an apostle he also cares for them as beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord's family. Although 'beloved' is a rather archaic word today, 'dear friends' (NIV) seems too weak. The Phillips paraphrase is probably best: 'I beg you, as those whom I love'.
 - iii. *I beseech you* is archaic language again, but 'I urge you' (NIV, NASB) is not forceful enough. **The word (*parakaleō*) has the sense 'I strongly urge you, I strongly appeal to you'.** ⁸
 - 1. The reality here is that Peter is not giving them wiggle room on this application.
 - This is an imperative... a command... a requirement.
 - a. We all have examples of the difference between "recommendations, strong recommendations, and requirements."

⁵ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2022), 63.

⁶ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2022), 63.

⁷ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 122.

⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 121–122.

2. **Why? → Because they have a new identity and need to live like it.**
 - a. It is the same for the examples of my growing up years, the required thing was required because it was part of our family identity.
- iv. **Because they are ‘aliens and exiles’ they should *abstain from the passions of the flesh*.** These ‘passions’ or strong desires (see note on this word, *epithymia*, at 1:14) which are characteristic of the sinful nature are not appropriate to a Christian’s heavenly homeland. Examples of such desires are found in **Galatians 5:19–21 and 1 John 2:16 (the discussion of ‘the flesh’ as the sinful nature in Gal. 5:13–25 is a good commentary on this phrase), but in fact any desires for things contrary to God’s will are prohibited here.**⁹
- f. **V.11** - They are still living in this world, but they are no longer part of it. → So their new values are to be expressed through their conduct.
 - i. I.e., Belief must correspond in behavior. → If I think I am... I should act like it.
 - ii. Again, this was not out of a moral performance or legalism standpoint. Jesus had saved them and continues to save them and keeps their salvation secure. → Salvation was and will always be a gift of grace by God. (cf. Eph 2:8-9)
 - iii. **We must avoid the trap of legalism as much as they needed to.** → This is also what Paul writes to address in the Galatian church.
 1. ²¹**I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. ¹O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ²Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?** (Gal. 2:21-3:3)
- g. **V. 12** - **Living out our new identity is not merely about avoiding sin, but it is also about living in an honorable way among all people (especially those who don’t believe).**
 - i. No new sentence begins here in the Greek text, for this verse is the positive counterpart to verse 11: not only are the readers to abstain from sinful desires (v. 11), they are also to continue to ‘*Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles*’. **Conduct here refers to a day-by-day pattern of life (see note on this word at 1:15).** Peter calls unbelievers *Gentiles*, not because he thinks that his readers were all Jewish Christians, but because he once again assumes that Christians (both literal Jews and literal Gentiles within the body of Christ) are the ‘true Israel’. Therefore all who are not Christians (both literal Jews and literal Gentiles) are truly ‘Gentiles’ (cf. 4:3).¹⁰
 - ii. In the first century, Christians were called cannibals for eating the Lord’s Supper; they were called atheists for not worshipping the pagan gods; they were considered disruptors of society and rebels against the emperor.¹¹

⁹ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 122.

¹⁰ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 123.

¹¹ Juan R. Sanchez, *1 Peter for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2016), 96.

1. **Our battle is not against the unbelieving people of the world; they are our mission field. It is against our own natural, sinful desires—and no amount of insulation from the world “out there” will leave behind our desires “in here.”**¹²
- iii. One of the primary questions of living in an honorable way for the mature and maturing Christian is, **“How can I honor God in these circumstances or in this relationship?”**
 1. Christian maturity is not merely about avoiding sin... yes, that is important!
 2. We grow into Christian maturity as we begin to live more and more with the goal to glorify and honor God in all our circumstances.
 - a. We honor God in our relationships.
 - b. We honor God in our grief and distress.
 - c. We honor God in our joy and celebration.
 - d. We honor God in our business, career, and scholastic pursuits.
 - e. Etc.
 3. Why do we do this? → So that others will believe and experience abundant life in Jesus! (cf. v.12 / Jn. 10:10)

¹² Juan R. Sanchez, *1 Peter for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2016), 95.