

**COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS
PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS**

5.

**C. THE BASIS FOR PAUL'S PRAYER
EPHESIANS 2:1-22**

Paul's assurance of the ultimate unity of all things in Christ was based on the work that Jesus had already done to bring Jews and Gentiles together. If God could unite Jews and Gentiles, He surely also could unite anything and everything. Paul explained that Jesus united Jews and Gentiles in two ways. First, He united them in sinfulness by showing that Jews and Gentiles were equally sinful and equally lost. Second, He united them in redemption by providing the same salvation to both. Since Jews and Gentiles have been made the same in both of these fundamental relationships, every other distinction that might keep them apart is insignificant. That new relationship between Jews and Gentiles was proof to Paul that God eventually will bring all things everywhere in the whole cosmos into the same marvelous harmony.

1. [Jews and Gentiles are united in sinfulness] (2:1-3).
 - a. ***And you*** [Gentiles] ***were dead in trespasses and sins*** (2:1-2)
 - (1) ***In which you previously lived*** (2:2a)
 - (2) ***According to*** (2:2b-2c):
 - (a) ***This worldly age*** (2:2c)
 - (b) ***And according to the ruler of the powers of the air*** (2:2d-2f)
 - [1] ***The spirit who still is working*** (2:2d)
 - [2] ***In the disobedient*** (2:2e).
 - b. ***We*** [Jews] ***also all previously*** (2:3)
 - (1) ***Conducted ourselves like them*** (2:3b)
 - (a) ***In the lusts of our flesh*** (2:3c)
 - (b) ***Doing the things demanded by the flesh and by the mind*** (2:3d);
 - (2) ***And we were by nature children under wrath, just like the others*** (2:3e).

Paul began his discussion of how Jesus brought Jews and Gentiles together by recognizing that Jews and Gentiles were equally sinful. To clarify the equal sinfulness of both groups, Paul discussed the case of each one separately. He began with the Gentiles.

Verses 1-2. You were dead in trespasses and sins. By "you" Paul meant Gentiles, since the church in Ephesus was composed mostly of Gentiles. He assured them that formerly they were dead in trespasses and sins because sinfulness was the manner in which they had lived. Sinfulness had been their way of life.

He specified two sources of evil that influenced the Gentiles to live in sin. The first was "this worldly age." By "worldly," Paul meant actions inspired by material objects found on the earth, instead of by spiritual powers that are found in heaven. By "this age," Paul referred to the period

of time in which they were living. The times in which they lived were sinful times. Sinful ways of acting and living were dominant all around them, and the Ephesians to whom Paul was writing formerly had accepted and practiced that way of life.

Because the Gentiles practiced sins, they experienced the consequences of sin, which is death. Sin brings death to a person's whole being. His inner spirit dies, which means it no longer can function to do what it was created to do. A person's spirit is a real entity, but it is made of spirit instead of physical elements. Our spirits are created in God's likeness, because they are spirit in nature as He is a Spirit. Humans are the only creatures God ever made who are a combination of both spirit and matter. Angels are only spirits. Animals are only material, but humans are both. Because humans have spirits, we can conceive of a spirit God and can have fellowship with a God who is a Spirit.

Humans are given spirits so we can be friends and companions with God, but when we sin our spirits lose that ability to communicate with God. We no longer have the power to know and experience God. Deadliness lays hold on our inward selves, and satisfying the body becomes our only concern. It becomes our regular way of life. We are separated from God and righteousness, which bring life, peace, and joy within. We are dead in sin.

The deadness that lays hold on us when we reject God and go our own way has effects far beyond just our inner spirits. It affects our bodies in the same way that it affects our spirits. Our bodies begin to decay and weaken until eventually we die. God did not intend for the wonderful bodies He gave to humans to lie useless and lifeless in the grave. Sin destroys the original intensions of God. Instead of vibrant life, it brings death—death to the spirit and death to the body.

The Gentiles knew about sin and death. Sin was the way they lived, and death was their destination. They knew death was real and feared it. Because they feared death, it became an obsession that dominated their minds. They were dead in trespasses and sins.

The second source of sin in their lives was “the ruler of the powers of the air.” The word translated “powers” means “authorities.” It is difficult to conceive what authorities the atmosphere might possess that could influence people to practice trespasses and sins. Paul must have been referring to some power in the air other than the physical makeup of the atmosphere. His statement only becomes understandable if we recognize that he was talking about powers present in the air around us other than the air itself. The powers that exist in the air and have power to influence people to do evil are unseen spirit beings. They dwell in the air because they are spirit beings. They do not have bodies that are able to live in the physical realm. So they live in the unseen air that surrounds us. Paul recognized that those powers were evil spirit beings. He was talking about evil spirits or demons who work to influence people to believe falsehood and practice evil.

Paul’s statement referred to more than just the evil spirits. He said the Gentiles were influenced by the “ruler of the powers in the air.” The ruler of evil spirits who live in the unseen world around us is the devil or Satan. The Gentile believers in Ephesus formerly lived under the influence of Satan. They lived sinful lives because they were responsive to the influence of Satan and his fallen angel followers. Paul emphasized that Satan and his demon followers still were working in the lives of those who remained disobedient, though the Ephesian believers had been freed from Satan’s hold on their lives by trusting Jesus as their Savior. Nonetheless, they formerly had been followers of Satan and demons and had lived in trespasses and sins.

The Gentile way of life was the way of trespasses and sins. The condition in which they lived was death. They already were dead spiritually, and they were in the process of dying physically.

Verses 3. We also lived like them. Then Paul pointed out that “we” were no better. By “we,” he meant the Jews, since his former life had been that of a Jew. He rightly included himself as one of the Jews, because formerly he had been a leading example of one who zealously practiced the Jewish way of life. He emphasized that the Jewish way of life, which he had formerly practiced was as sinful as the Gentile way of life. Before Jesus saved him and other Jewish believers, they lived the same way that the Gentiles lived. Paul described both the characteristics and the consequences of the Jewish way of life..

First, Paul described the characteristics of the Jewish way of life by saying they were absorbed by “the lusts of the flesh.” They yielded to the emotions and desires of the flesh instead of to the things that feed the spirit. The Jews knew about God and His spiritual truths because it had been handed down to them from their ancestors, but they still lived for their fleshly desires instead of for the spiritual insights God had revealed to them. They had received revelations about God for 2,000 years, but still they gave in to, encouraged, and dwelled on the desires and cravings of their bodies. They did so because they knew of God but they did not know

God as their Friend and Savior. Jews lived the same practices as the Gentiles. They too were dominated and directed by the desires and inclinations of their bodies.

Paul had a dim view of the physical inclinations of people's bodies, and he acknowledged that the Jews were just as guilty of giving in to those evil inclinations as the Gentiles. The Jews, like the Gentiles, were busy practicing the things their fallen bodies desired. Their inclinations were no better than the Gentiles, and Jewish people fully participated in those evil inclinations, just like the Gentiles. Paul recognized that he was a Jew who had been just as sinful as the Gentiles.

The word translated "flesh" is one of two Greek words that refer to physical bodies. The word *σῶμα* (*sōma*) almost always is used to distinguish between the physical nature of the body and the immaterial nature of a spirit being. The word used in this verse is *σαρξ* (*sarks*). It almost always is used to emphasize the soft, fragile, perishable nature of the body and its parts. It is usually translated into English as "flesh."

In the Bible, the body is universally recognized as fallen and corrupted. It is subject to decay and death; but also its inclinations, desires, and passions are in a fallen condition. They are twisted out of shape and inclined toward evil instead of toward good. Therefore, it is easier for a person to do wrong than right. If a person follows the inclinations of his body, he will sin and suffer the consequences. The fallen, warped condition of the body is best described by the Greek word *sarks* and the English word "flesh."

The words Paul used in his statement about the sinfulness of the Jews are strong and powerful words. When he spoke of the inclinations of the flesh, he did not use the word "desires," but the word "lusts" or "cravings." That word describes a strong, insistent desire. When he spoke of the influence those lusts had on the person, he did not use the word "desired," but the word "demanded." That word referred to determined commands and demands. Paul described the body as having strong, insistent urges. Those urges were focused on evil,

and they were demanding in their influence on people living in them.

In addition, when Paul spoke of the demands of the body, he included the demands of the mind. The word translated "mind" refers to the ability to think and reason. Mind is a function of a person's brain, which is the physical mechanism through which the mind works. When Paul coupled "the mind" with "the flesh," he clarified that a person's mind also is a part of his fallen condition. The human mind finds it easier to accept error than truth, just as the human body finds it easier to practice sin than righteousness. The Jews not only were following the fallen urges of their flesh, they also were accepting the fallen ideas of their minds. They had the law God had given them. As a result, they knew the expectations of God in a way the Gentiles could not. However, instead of following the truths God had revealed to them, they followed the inclinations of their flesh and their minds, just as the Gentiles did. They knew better than the Gentiles, but they did not do better.

Paul acknowledged that the Jews were just as guilty of giving in to those evil inclinations of their flesh and their minds as the Gentiles were. The Jews, like the Gentiles, were busy practicing the things their bodies desired and the things their minds approved. Their inclinations were no better than the Gentiles. Unsaved Jews still practiced those inclinations, and Jewish believers formerly had participated in them as well.

For additional discussion of the meaning of "the flesh," please see the essay that follows below.

Second, Paul described the consequences of the Jewish way of life by saying they were "by nature children of wrath," just as the Gentiles were. "Children of wrath" means to belong to wrath, as a child belongs to his or her parents. They were under the wrath of God, because they rejected what God had revealed to them and had turned to their own way. They rebelled against God, and their rebellion was made worse because God had revealed to them a better way. Therefore, God was angry toward them, and they were going to remain under His anger forever unless they experienced spiritual salvation through Jesus.

They were not under the wrath of God because they had evil inclinations, but because they gave in to those inclinations. By yielding to, excusing, and defending the evil inclinations that were born into their bodies and minds, they came to be subject to the wrath of God. Since the Jews trusted the inclinations of the body and the mind instead of the revealed truths of God, they were destined to wrath just as much as the Gentiles were.

When Jesus set out to bring Jews and Gentiles together, he began by recognizing that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are under the same condemnation because both groups follow the same sinful inclinations of the flesh and of the mind. God judges both Jews and Gentiles to be equal in our evil inclinations and equal in our condemnation.

ESSAY ON THE MEANING OF “THE FLESH”

Paul said the Jews were as guilty of practicing “the lusts of the flesh” as the Gentiles were. While Paul’s accusation that Jews and Gentiles are equally sinful is abundantly clear, Bible students have not always agreed on what he meant by “the lusts of the flesh.” All agree that “lusts,” meant sinful and evil desires, but the question is, Where do those evil desires reside? What is this “flesh” from which those lusts arise? Two distinct explanations have been given in answer to that question.

ONE VIEW IS THAT “FLESH” IS A METAPHOR FOR A SINFUL NATURE. The most wide-spread explanation of what Paul meant by “the flesh” is that all people have within us an entity that inclines us toward sin. They call that entity our “sinful nature” and contrast it with a “new nature” that Jesus gives us when we are saved.

The concept of a sinful nature. By “sinful nature,” interpreters mean that all people have within us an unseen and undefinable entity that afflicts every person who has ever lived. They hold that that entity not only exists in unsaved people but also continues to plague believers after we are saved. Interpreters and preachers speak of a “new nature” that enters people when we believe, and they contend that the “new nature” struggles with the “old nature” that continues to reside in us after salvation. That way of describing people’s struggles with sin is so wide-spread and has been repeated so often that many Bible interpreters accept it without question and without trying to understand what it really means. Some Bible translators have accepted that view so thoroughly that they go so far as to translate the word “flesh” as “sinful nature” in the text of their Bible versions. Examples are the New Living Translation and all varieties of the New International Version. Some interpreters go even further and use the expression “old flesh nature,” which is actually an oxymoron. “Flesh” means something physical, tangible, and visible. “Nature” means a quality that is unseen, intangible, and undefinable. “Old flesh nature” actually is a concept that cannot exist. Even apart from that self-contradictory term, the idea of “sinful nature” has often been stated, but never adequately explained.

The problem with the concept of a sinful nature. The problem with the explanation that “flesh” means “sinful nature” is that no one has ever been able to define what the so-called “old nature” is or where it can be found inside a person. If we cannot define what it is, it definitely creates a problem for someone who wants to control it. Since no one can see it or define “sinful nature,” no one has any idea about how to overcome it. Those who do not know Jesus, simply surrender to it. Sincere believers moan over their sinful natures and regret that they are constantly harassed by it, but they have no idea how they can change it or escape from it. Their only recourse is to long for the day when they will reach heaven and be free of it.

It may very well be that the concept of “the old nature” is a big part of the reason why people are becoming complacent or even indifferent to their struggle with sin. They seem to conclude that their “old nature” is something they cannot change, so they just have to accept it. It is frighteningly easy to change the

expression “old nature” into “my nature” and proclaim it to be just the person’s unique way of being and living. Can it be that the concept of people’s intangible nature is the reason people say, “I was born that way,” and mean, “This drive of mine is something I cannot change and the way I am supposed to be”? Today, that point of view is used as the excuse for accepting homosexuality, sensuality, child abuse, thirst for alcohol, dependence on drugs, lying, stealing, cursing, gossiping, laziness, and any other tendency that someone excuses and declares to be natural for him. It may be that we need to reexamine the concept of “human nature” that lies behind that kind of dangerous and destructive thinking.

The idea of “old sinful nature” originates from a desire to reject a concept that was prevalent in several forms of Greek philosophy. Several forms of Greek philosophy held that material things are evil, while spirit beings are good. They considered living in bodies to be a burden, and they desired to escape from the body and achieve a totally spirit existence. They believed that if they could escape from the body, they would be good. It was a form of dualism that saw evil residing in all things physical and good residing in all things spiritual. Scripture teaches an entirely different view of body and spirit. It teaches that physical things, including the human body, can be good or evil and can be used for good purposes or evil purposes. The Bible reveals that humans were given bodies and spirits, with the intention that we would serve God with both body and spirit. God made human bodies good and wanted us to use them for good. However, from the beginning humans have chosen to sin and as a result have become hardened into an inclination that makes it easier for us to do right than wrong. Good or evil in our bodies is determined by our choices, not in the way we were created by God. Likewise, the Bible teaches that spirit beings can be holy or depraved. For example, angels are holy spirit beings who serve God, while demons are evil spirit beings who rebel against God. According to the Bible, both angels and demons were created good for the purpose of serving God. God gave them wills to choose directions for themselves. Some chose to trust and obey God, and we call them “angels.” Others chose to rebel and to resist God, and we call them “demons.” Even spirit beings originally were not set in one way or the other. They chose rightly or wrongly and became hardened in the choices they made. In the light of the Scripture, it is right to reject the dualism of Greek philosophy, but it is not necessary to change the meaning of “flesh” into “nature” in order to reject Greek dualism. It is not necessary to turn “flesh” into an intangible, indefinable concept in order to show Greek dualism to be erroneous. It is possible to hold a view that sees evil residing in our bodies without concluding that physical things are inherently evil.

A MORE PRACTICAL VIEW IS THAT “FLESH” MEANS THE HUMAN BODY AS CORRUPTED BY PEOPLE’S FALL INTO SIN. A second view is that “flesh” means the human body corrupted by sin.

The concept of corruption of people’s bodies by sin. This view recognizes that the physical human body is not dead and lifeless, like a piece of stone or wood. It is not unfeeling like a blade of grass or the trunk of a tree. A person’s body is a living creature that has emotions, feelings, desires, and thoughts. The problem is that those emotions and those thoughts tend toward wrong instead of toward right. This view builds on the earliest revelations in the Bible that teach that, after the sin of Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden, both the spirits and the bodies of people became twisted, broken, and warped. The spirit was cut off from fellowship with God, and the body’s inclinations and desires began to desire evil instead of good. Genesis 1:31 says that after the Creation God saw that all He had created was very good. That goodness included the whole physical earth, space, and heavenly bodies, including the bodies of animals and people. Then Genesis 3 describes how Eve and Adam rejected clear instructions God had given to them. As a result, they were punished with fundamental changes in their relationships and inclinations. Both people’s bodies and people’s spirits became corrupted and twisted from the good way that God created them to be. The evil in people does not come from our inherent makeup. It does not come from some flaw in the way God created us. It comes from our rebellion against God. The original rebellion of Eve and Adam corrupted humanity and turned our spirits and our bodies away from the good persons God created us to be and toward the evil inclinations our original ancestors chose.

Those inclinations have become stronger and more ingrained in people as years of rebellion have continued on and on.

As a result of the fall of humanity, neither our spirits nor our bodies function the way God created them to be. Instead, they more easily desire evil than good. Both our spirits and our bodies are naturally inclined to go in the wrong direction. We are born with those inclinations, and we pass them on from one generation to the next. Many deny the uncomfortable fact that people are born with evil inclinations, but only a little observation shows clearly that all people live the truth of that reality. Even those who deny the reality of the evil bent in humanity know they must set up schools and institutions to try to train children away from their inborn inclinations and turn them into constructive human beings. Even those who reject the need for God know that a person cannot go on in the condition into which he was born and achieve any success in life. They try to effect that change through education and discipline, but the sad fact is that no human effort or scheme has ever succeeded in changing what humans are or in eliminating the need for years of effort to make us in any way useful and productive. The fact is that teaching and training is never sufficient, and all of us need God to make a genuine change of direction in our lives. The Scriptures reveal that a true change of direction can only be achieved by surrender of ourselves to God and His Son Jesus Christ.

People's spirits are corrupt because of sin. The human spirit is as inclined toward rebellion as the evil spirit of fallen angels. All of us sooner than later choose to follow the evil inclinations born into us and we become set in those rebellious ways. Our spirits, which were made to reflect God's likeness, become so numb and dead that they cannot find God at all and cannot have fellowship with Him. They become so set in evil that no one can change his inner inclinations by himself. God must work a miracle in us to raise our spirits from the dead before he can begin to live a new way of life.

People's bodies are corrupt because of sin. Likewise, because of the fall of humanity, the human body is inclined toward evil instead of good. We all recognize that a person must train and control his natural urges and desires before he can use his body to accomplish something good in life. We know we must begin early to teach children to not follow their natural inclinations and to control themselves if they are to live in harmony with others. It takes years of training and teaching to teach people to live in a constructive way. Some never learn to live a productive way of living, and eventually they destroy themselves. The body is a wondrous instrument to use for accomplishing great and worthy purposes, but it is also a weight and burden that we must struggle to control before we can use it constructively. That struggle must continue throughout life, or the natural inclinations of our bodies will destroy us.

"Lusts of the flesh" means that, since the fall of humanity into sin, human bodies have a natural inclination toward sin. As a result, it is easier for our bodies to do wrong than right. We can understand that concept, because we live with it every day. The inclinations of our bodies are so prevalent that we can understand easily what we need to work on to correct them. However, we soon discover that, no matter how hard we work, we never seem to succeed in changing what we are and what we are inclined to do. The Scriptures confirm that reality and teach us we are incapable of fundamentally changing the natural inclinations that is in our bodies. The only way we can ever change those inclinations is through the power of God.

People's minds are corrupt because of sin. When Paul spoke of the "lusts of the flesh," he also mentioned "lusts of the mind" (Eph. 2:3). By that statement, he showed that he recognized that people's mental faculties also are affected and corrupted by sin. It is not only easier for human bodies to practice sin instead of righteousness, it is also easier for human minds to accept error instead of truth. We do not want to believe such a dismal view of ourselves; however, all the experience of mankind confirms that that affliction is true and correct. No one has to teach us how to be ignorant, any more than someone has to teach us how to do wrong. We just naturally are uninformed and ignorant until we are taught. It takes many years and much effort to teach us how to be informed and accurate. Some never learn it. The Scriptures teach, no matter how earnestly we are

taught and how diligently we study, the natural bent of our minds toward error never changes without the help of the power of God.

People without the Holy Spirit tend to believe that human drives and human reasonings always lead a person in the right direction. They say, "I was born that way" and by that statement they mean, "The way I was born is the way I am supposed to be. That way has to be right." Others say repeatedly, "What I think is . . ." and by that statement they mean "What I think has to be true and the right way to think, because it seems so logical to me." The tragedy is that the teaching many receive today adds to people's erroneous thoughts, and the training many receive often encourages them to accept their inborn evil inclinations instead of controlling them. Paul taught the opposite. He taught that the natural inclinations of the human mind are more likely to be wrong than right and that the natural thoughts of the human mind are more often erroneous than correct. That very fact is the reason all of us require years of teaching and training before we are equipped to deal with life successfully. It takes a long time to train our minds to recognize truth and reject error. Some are pleased with their erroneous thoughts and never change them, even after years of study and experimentation that should have changed their minds long ago. Approving homosexual behavior, justifying abortion, advocating for same sex marriage, and support for evolution of the species are four areas that offer abundance evidence of that tendency among even highly educated people.

The solution to people's corruption by sin. The great need of the human race is to understand how to deal with and conquer the evil inclinations that are born in us. Sadly, since our minds are inclined toward error, when we try to develop a solution for ourselves, we always end up with failure. Over the ages, people have offered hundreds of ideas and suggested scores of actions to try to deal with the sad state of the human condition. Some of the methods that have been developed by people are education, laws, punishment, psychoanalysis, philosophy, counsel, sports, exercise, alcohol, and drugs. We spend billions of dollars on all of those efforts. Some good is accomplished, but the basic problem always remains. In the end, all of those efforts fail to solve the basic corruption that resides in people.

When we finally come to that realization, we begin to be ready to seek God's help to change what we are. The only solution that has ever made a real difference in the fallen condition of humanity does not come from human effort or human minds. It comes from God. God's Word is the only sure guide to genuine righteousness and infallible truth, not the human body or the human mind. God's salvation is the only power that can change the fallen condition of humanity. The Scriptures reveal to us the way God works to remove our sins and reverse our fallen condition. We call the change He makes in us "salvation."

Changing our inborn inclination is God's work, but we have to accept His work and yield our fallen selves to Him. The change begins when we trust Jesus, and it occurs in an instant. However, the initial change that salvation makes in us is only a beginning of a long process that eventually makes us fully free of sin and its effects on our lives. Salvation has a definite time of beginning, but completing our salvation involves a long process that God directs every step of the way and that He will eventually finish in a dramatic climax. The whole process occurs in three distinct stages.

Salvation removes the corruption of our spirits the moment we trust Jesus. Salvation changes a person's inner spirit. Through a miracle of God, our dead spirits are raised to life. We become new persons, and inwardly we begin to desire and seek after good rather than evil. We know we have a new life, but soon we realize we are only children in God's new life, just as a new born baby is fully alive the moment he is born but still has a long way to go to understand what his life is or what to do with it. A new believer has to learn and grow in the new life God has given to His spirit. The experience that brings that change into a person is called regeneration.

Salvation gives us increasing strength to control the corruption in our bodies as long as we live. As we seek to understand the new life God gives us when we trust in Him, we soon learn that the change God made in us did not affect our whole selves. We soon realize that the change in our spirits does not immediately change the inclinations of our bodies and minds. Our bodies do not suddenly become free of sinful urges, and our minds do not suddenly become able to turn from ignorance to understanding. After we are saved, we still look the same as we did before; and we have the same feelings, urges, and habits that we had before. We still have the same mistaken ideas we drilled into our minds when we were seeking truth on our own. The difference in us is that we have an entirely different attitude toward our bodies and minds and toward the inclinations of our bodies and our minds. Inwardly we do not defend the natural inclinations of our bodies and minds. We find no real pleasure in satisfying them. We are ashamed and disappointed in ourselves when we yield to their enticements. Every failure leads to a new commitment and a new determination not to fall again.

Salvation gives us steadily increasing strength to control the corruption in our bodies as long as we live. Salvation gives us a new awareness of the evil in our bodies and minds, a new desire to control those evil inclinations, and a new power to bring them under control. Those new attitudes come from our changed spirits and also from the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We begin to want to bring under control the evil tendencies in our bodies and minds and to make them subject to the teachings of Jesus. God gives us the responsibility of bringing our bodies and minds under control and of making them useful to Him. He also gives us the presence of the Holy Spirit to help us do it. Our bodies still have evil inclinations and desires; but through constant effort and through guidance of the Holy Spirit, increasingly we are able to bring them under control. Gradually we teach those bodies to accomplish good and to give glory to God. A tension takes place between our changed spirits and our unchanged bodies.

Paul was deeply aware of that tension in his own life. When Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, he immediately changed directions and became willing to do whatever Jesus told him to do (Acts. 9:3-8). Soon afterward Jesus sent Ananias to explain to Paul what Jesus wanted him to do. However, even after understanding his mission, he was not immediately capable of doing it. He had to spend three years in Arabia praying and practicing to retrain his actions from hostility to Christians to convincing others to be Christians. He had to diligently restudy the Scripture to redirect his thinking from worship through rituals and ceremonies to worship through love and witnessing. Only then was he ready to begin to fulfill the mission Jesus gave him to do. Furthermore, even after many years of service he still had to struggle with temptation to sin. In Romans 7:14-18, he said,

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. ¹⁶ If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. ¹⁷ Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. ¹⁹ For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. ²⁰ Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. ²² For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? ²⁵ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (KJV)

Some have contended that in Romans 7:14-18 Paul was talking about his life before he was saved, but he did not say, "This is the way I used to be." He said, "I am carnal," and "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." All his statements were in the present tense. He was talking about his

struggles with his flesh at the time of his writing, which was years after his salvation experience. Even after years of learning and growing, the tension in him was real. The same struggles exist in every Christian, because our spirits are made new but our bodies are still corrupt. We have to struggle with our bodies every day, though we become much more able to keep them under control as we practice walking with Jesus each day.

When we understand the tension between spirit and body that we experience after we are saved, we know what we are dealing with. It is a concept we can take hold of and grapple with. The evil urges of a physical body are things tangible, identifiable, and controllable. With God's help, we can make progress in bringing them under control, so that even our unchanged bodies can reflect Jesus' likeness and God's holiness. We become able to make progress against our unruly bodies. More and more we come to the place where the weaknesses of our bodies have less and less impact on our lives. Likewise we learn to have less confidence in our own ability to understand, so that we become willing to listen to others who are ahead of us in the Christian life. We also learn how to accept what the Bible teaches instead of what seems reasonable to us. We become more and more like what our spirits want us to be, and in time people will find it hard to believe the kind of persons we used to be. That experience of growth in righteousness and service is called sanctification.

True born-again believers continue to make progress in controlling the weaknesses of our bodies and minds throughout our lives until death comes and ends the struggle. At death, our bodies will become lifeless and incapable of sin, while our spirits will rise up to live with God in complete cleanness and holiness. Our spirits then will be delivered from every inclination toward sin forever.

Salvation removes the corruption of our bodies at the Resurrection. The final deliverance of our bodies and minds from their fallen condition does not come at death. That deliverance awaits the Resurrection. Salvation is completed in us when our bodies are raised and changed at the Resurrection. God did not intend for the marvelous bodies He created to become dead and useless. He intended for them to live forever in harmony with Him, in righteousness and in truth. Dead in the grave definitely is not what God created the superb human body to be. He will not leave us in that condition. He will continue to work until the day comes when He will save our bodies also by raising them from the dead and changing them to be clean and holy in His likeness. Salvation begins with changing our spirits on the day we accept Jesus. Salvation is completed when our bodies are changed on the day of Resurrection and reunited with our spirits.

On Resurrection Day, our bodies will be raised from the dead and changed into the likeness of Jesus' glorified body. We will have powers that are unimaginable to us today. Like Jesus' resurrected body, we will be able to translate ourselves from one place to another. We will be empowered to pass through walls without hindrance. We will be able to ascend through the heavens without a roaring, rumbling, rocket blowing fire and fury. Most of all, we will have minds that will know as we are known and bodies that naturally will do only what is good and constructive. Pain, suffering, tears, and death will be known no more. We will be able to live, walk, run, and fly like Jesus; and we will do it all for the glory of God. Furthermore, our new resurrected and glorified bodies will retain their powers and their goodness forever and ever.

When we are raised and glorified, our salvation will be complete. Believers' bodies will be freed from sin and its consequences, as believers' spirits already are washed clean by the blood of Jesus. On that day, we will be fully saved--spirit, soul, body, and mind. The process that began on the day we trusted Jesus will be finished, and forever after we will be free of sin and all of its consequences. The completion of our salvation on Resurrection Day is called glorification.

CONCLUSION. "Lusts of the flesh" in Scripture refers to evil drives in corrupted human bodies. While believers are still alive in this world, our spirits are made new; but our bodies are fallen from the condition in which God created them. Our bodies and minds are corrupted so that they are inclined toward evil and error instead of toward goodness and truth. That condition continues as long as we live in this world, though

increasingly we are able to bring those evil inclinations under control. However, the Scripture trumpets the great truth that God will not leave the bodies of believers in corruption forever. On Resurrection Day, our bodies will be restored to us cleansed of all evil inclination forevermore. God will change our bodies like He already has changed our spirits. He will make them fully clean and holy. We will be resurrected, cleansed, and glorified. We will be free from the lusts of the flesh forever.

2. [God has united Jews and Gentiles through giving both the same salvation] (2:4-7).

The second way Jesus shows His power to bring all things into unity is that He gives the same salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike. Because He judged Jews and Gentiles to be equally sinful, He is able to provide the same deliverance for both. In order to clarify that Jews and Gentiles both receive the same salvation, Paul defined and described that salvation in six points. The six points are:

- a. The source of salvation is God (v. 4).
- b. The three stages of salvation are new life, resurrection, and seating in heaven (vs. 5-6).

- c. The purpose of salvation is to display God's grace (v. 7).
- d. The means of salvation are God's grace and people's faith (vs. 8-10).
- e. The effect of salvation is that it changes Gentiles' relationships and Jews' customs (vs. 11-18).
- f. The end result of salvation is that it unites Jews and Gentiles into one citizenship, one family, and one holy temple (vs. 19-22).

Each of these points deserves careful consideration.

- a. [The source of salvation is God] **But God** (v. 4).
 - (1) *Who is abundant in mercy* (2:4b)]
 - (2) *Because of His great love with which He loves us* (2:4c)

Paul clearly declared that salvation is a work of God. He had described the damage that sin had brought to Jews and Gentiles. Then he introduced a great contrast. He said, "But God . . ." God's work is exactly opposite to people's works, and it produces the opposite results. Our sins produce death. God's works provide salvation and life. Paul clearly explained the reason for the difference. God's works are based on mercy and love.

Mercy means withholding the punishment we deserve. We deserve death and eternity in hell for rejecting God our Maker. God would be perfectly justified to execute that punishment on us the moment we sin and choose our way instead of His way. As much as He is hurt by our rejection, He does not react in anger. He withholds his wrath and extends mercy instead. His mercy gives us time to repent and trust in Him. He extends that mercy as long as He can, giving us every opportunity to see the folly of our sinful ways and seek for deliverance and salvation from Him. Unfortunately, if we

impose on His mercy too long, it eventually must end and we must pay for our sins. Nonetheless, God is much more interested in mercy than in wrath. People need to recognize that every day they remain alive is an expression of God's mercy and turn to Him for forgiveness before it is too late.

Love means giving us blessings we do not deserve. It goes far beyond mercy. Mercy is negative. It is noteworthy because of what it does not do. Love is positive. It is noteworthy for what it does do. It reaches down to us in our sins and in our fallen condition and pulls us out. It saves us from the consequences of our own deeds. Mercy provides an opportunity. Love provides deliverance. However, God's love cannot be operative in our lives to deliver us from our sins unless we are willing to respond to His love and love Him back. He does not force us to receive His salvation. He does not take away from us the dignity He gave us of making our own decisions, even the decision to accept or reject Him. Nothing

is sadder than unrequited love. Don't leave God's love unrequited. The magnitude of His love was demonstrated when Jesus gave His life for you on the Cross. Give your heart to Him in love and be saved today.!

God distributes mercy and love to one and all alike. Since Gentiles and Jews are equal in their

sinfulness, God is able to distribute His mercy and love equally to both. Whoever we are, we are living because of His mercy. Respond to Him in loving surrender today and become a beneficiary of His love.

- b.. [The three stages of salvation are new life, resurrection, and seating in heaven] (vs. 5-6).
- (1) ***Makes us alive with Christ*** (2:5b)
 - (a) ***Though we were dead in trespasses*** (2:5c).
 - (b) ***(By grace you are saved!)*** (2:5d)
 - (2) ***He also raises us up together*** (2:6a),
 - (3) ***And He seats us together in the heavens in Christ Jesus*** (2:6b),

The Bible is abundantly clear that salvation from sin does not come to us in one great leap. It has a beginning, a continuing expansion, and a glorious climax. Paul described it as coming in three dramatic stages. The three stages he described are: (1) He brings our spirits out of deadness into life (v. 5b). (2) He raises our bodies from the dead (v. 6a). (3) He makes a place for us in heaven (v. 6b).

In describing the three stages of salvation, Paul used the aorist form of the verb for each stage. The aorist form of Greek verbs is usually described as a past tense, but it really is not a tense form at all. All Greek grammarians and translators recognize that the time of an aorist verb form can be past at times, future at other times, and present sometimes. Therefore, it should not be described as a tense form at all. It does not describe the time of the verb but the state of the verb. The real meaning of the aorist verb form is that it describes completed action; and that action can be in the past, the present, or the future. Paul used that form of the verb to describe the three stages of salvation because all of the stages do not occur at the same time. The aorist verb form tells us that the events Paul described definitely will happen. They say nothing about the time when they will occur.

By using the aorist form of the three verbs, Paul indicated that the three stages of salvation are fixed actions that God definitely will fulfill but that the time for the fulfillment of each stage is in God's

hands. The best way to translate those verbs into English is to use a form of the English verb that also does not contain time significance but just describes action that will come to pass, without stating when they will come to pass. In English, the present tense form often has that meaning. The translation above uses that kind of construction. The verbs indicate what God does in each stage of salvation without tying the stages to any specific time. Thus, verses 5-6 describe three stages of salvation, without entering into the question of when they will occur.

The first stage of salvation begins at the moment we trust Jesus and God makes us alive in Christ (2:5). The life to which Paul referred is the new life Jesus gives to the spirit when we yield our lives to Jesus. Paul clarified what he meant when he said, "God makes us alive with Christ" by saying that prior to having that life we were "dead in trespasses." When he spoke of "dead in trespasses," he clearly was not talking about physical death because he was talking about people who still were alive physically while he was writing to them. By "dead in trespasses," he was describing the condition that controls all of us before we are saved. Before salvation, the spirit side of us is dead because of our trespasses and sins. We are physically alive but spiritually dead. Then Paul said Jesus takes us out of that spiritual death and gives us life. Since the death he was talking about was spiritual death, the life he was talking about was spiritual life also. Jesus takes away the deadness

that comes from sin and gives us a new life that He creates in us.

When a person's spirit is dead, it cannot carry out the function for which it exists. The reason God gave us a spirit is so we can have awareness of Him and so we can have fellowship with Him. Sin drains life from that spirit, and we are separated from God. The new life that Jesus gives allows our spirits to function as God intended. We become privileged again to communicate with God and to have fellowship with Him. That spiritual life comes to us the minute we yield ourselves to Jesus, but Paul's words emphasize that that new life is only the first step into salvation.

The second stage of salvation begins when God raises us up (2:6a). The reference in those words must be something other than giving life to our spirits, because Paul had described that result of salvation already. Paul was referring to raising up believers' bodies from the dead. Though the resurrection from the dead has not yet occurred, it also is a part of the salvation that Jesus provides. He does not leave us half saved. He gives new life to the spirit the moment we yield our lives to Him. He will give new life to the body at the Resurrection. Then our whole selves will be saved. The future resurrection of our bodies from the dead to new life is as certain as the new life He already has given to our souls. He has promised it. He will fulfill it without fail.

The third stage of salvation begins when Jesus gives us seats in heaven, that is, when He

takes us to a place He has built for us in heaven and allow us to live with Him and serve Him (2:6b). Our spirits are seated in heaven when they depart from our bodies. Our bodies join our spirits and are seated in heaven when they arise from the dead. That blessing also is a part of our salvation. When that day comes, our salvation will be complete.

The three parts of our salvation are all parts of one salvation. They are blessings God decrees for us when we trust in Jesus, though they are not all dispensed to us at the same time.

The point Paul was making was that the three stages of salvation come to Jews and Gentiles alike. To emphasize that point, he added the prefix *συν* (*sun*) to each of the three verbs. That prefix means "with." In English we indicate the same idea by using the word "together." Thus, Paul said God gives all three stages of salvation to Jews and Gentiles together. They come to Jews and Gentiles in the same way, with the same result for both.

Giving the same salvation to everyone in the same way is a necessary part of giving unity to all things. If God had different kinds of salvation or different methods of salvation for different people or for different ages or for different conditions, we would never all be able to be one. We will be one because He has only one salvation. He has never had but one salvation, and He never will have but one salvation. Salvation comes to everyone in the same three stages, and all the stages come to everyone from and through the combined work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

- c. [The purpose of salvation is to display God's grace] (vs. 7).
 - (1) *So that in the coming ages He may display the immeasurable riches of His grace* (2:7a)
 - (2) *Through His kindness to us in Christ Jesus* (2:7b).

Then Paul described the ultimate purpose for which God gives the same salvation to everyone. That purpose is to put His grace on display throughout all the ages to come.

The verb that is translated "may display" is also in the aorist form, though in this case it is in the

subjunctive mood. All English versions recognize the impossibility of making a meaningful translation of the verb in this clause by translating it in the past tense, since the phrase says He will show His grace "in the ages to come." Most translate the verb as "might show" or "might display," which is subjunctive mood but not past tense. The use of

that translation in English versions shows that translators recognize that the aorist verb form does not necessarily imply past tense. If the aorist form is not past tense in this verse, it should not be translated in the past tense in the previous verses. In each case, the verbs describe events that are set and determined as parts of every person's salvation, to take place in God's own time and way.

God's purpose in all three stages of salvation is to demonstrate how immeasurably great His grace and kindness are. Salvation will display it in all the coming ages, not just at the final End but in every coming age. They display His gracious kindness today, and they will continue to display it through all the ages until the End and after the End.

- d. [The means of salvation is God's grace and people's faith] (2:8-10).
 - (1) ***For by grace you are saved through faith*** (2:8a)
 - (2) ***And this [salvation] is not of yourselves*** (2:8b-9).
 - (a) ***It is God's gift*** (2:8c)
 - (b) ***Not of works, so that no one may boast*** (2:9)
 - (3) ***For we are His product*** (2:10)
 - [1] ***Created in Christ Jesus*** (2:10b)
 - [2] ***For good works*** (2:10c-10e)
 - [a] ***For which God prepared in advance*** (2:10d)
 - [b] ***So that we might practice them*** (2:10e).

Paul went on to explain that the reason why our salvation will display God's grace through all the coming ages is that we are saved through the grace of God but also through faith. He clearly implied that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace through faith because he spoke of "you" and "we" interchangeably. He said, "For by grace you [Gentiles] are saved through faith and then added, "for we [Jews and Gentiles] are His product. The salvation of Jews and Gentiles were so united in his mind that he switched pronouns without making any distinction about who would receive salvation.

Ephesians 2:8, he states both in one unbroken statement. He gave the same emphasis to "through faith" that he gave to "by grace." He saw no conflict between them. In fact, he saw them as working together as one complete action, both sides of which are necessary to produce salvation.

Even though Paul emphasized that our salvation comes through the grace of God, he was careful to state that it also comes through people's faith. Paul did not intend for his emphasis on God's grace to eliminate the necessity or importance of people's faith. He was clear that salvation comes to us through two channels. It comes "by grace," and it also comes "through faith," yet the two channels never conflict but always agree with each other. Verse 8 is Paul's classic statement that unites in one sentence the two choices that are required for salvation. In Ephesian 1:3-7 Paul emphasized that salvation is a work of God's grace, while at other times, such as Acts 16:31, he emphasized that salvation is the result of a believer's faith. In

Paul's main emphasis in this passage is that salvation comes from God, but even while making that emphasis he was careful to include the insight that faith on our part is necessary if God is to do His work of salvation in our lives. Paul praised God for salvation, but he just as surely affirmed that faith on our part is required for us to have salvation. It is an act of our wills. We are responsible for making the choice, and face the consequences of the choice we make. God's free and sovereign grace and people's free and independent choice are not opponents. They fit precisely together, and one without the other is incomplete.

Paul then stated that salvation does not come from ourselves. It is a gift of God. We cannot do any work that will earn salvation, pay for it, or deserve it. However, we must remember that faith is not a work. It is a willing acceptance of what God does to save us. Works are not necessary for salvation, but faith is. Our free choice does not

determine God's choice, and His free choice of us does not determine our choice. However, both are necessary, and in His divine order the two never conflict but always agree.

Some question how to apply the phrase "not of ourselves." They question whether Paul meant that grace is not from us or whether he meant that faith is not from us. A better understanding is that he meant salvation is not from us. While we must accept salvation if it is to become effective in our lives, our faith does not produce salvation. It simply opens the way for God to do His work of salvation in our lives. God planned salvation before He made the cosmos. God in Christ paid for our salvation on the cross. God makes salvation effective in us when we trust Jesus. God grows us in the practice of salvation as we live with Him. God will complete our salvation in the End when He reunites our bodies, souls, and spirits in perfect harmony and restores all things in heaven and on earth into one harmonious whole. Salvation is a creative work of God from beginning to end; however, it begins to be effective in us when we add our choice to His and allow Him to do His work in us. That choice on our part is not made or determined by Him. It must come from our own free and independent will, but it always ends up

agreeing with the choice of us that God also has freely and independently made before the foundation of the world.

Paul further clarified that salvation is entirely a work of God by stating that it does not come from our works. If we earned salvation by our works, we would have reason to brag about what we did. Since we are not able to do any work that will earn our salvation or even contribute to our salvation, God deserves all the credit.

Though salvation does not come through human works, Paul asserted that good works are involved in salvation. They are the result of salvation, not the cause of it. When God saves us, we are a new product. Part of that product is that we are recreated with the ability and power to do good works. God planned and produced a salvation that includes doing good works as an integral part of what it is. God has prepared in advance for us to do those good works as a necessary part of the salvation He gives.

The source, stages, purpose, and means of salvation are the same for Jews and Gentiles alike. For both, it is salvation by God's grace through people's faith.

- e. [The effect of salvation is that it changes both Jews and Gentiles] (2:11-18)
 - (1) **Therefore, remember** [that He changed your relationships] (2:11-14)
 - (a) **That at one time you Gentiles in the body** (2:11b-12)
 - [1] **Who are called "the uncircumcision"** (2:11c-11e)
 - [a] **By those who are called "the circumcised"** (2:11d)
 - [b] **In the flesh made by hands** (2:11e)
 - [2] **That at that time you were without Christ** (2:12)
 - [a] **Ones excluded from the citizenship of Israel** (2:12b)
 - [b] **And foreigners to the covenants of promise** (2:12c)
 - [c] **Ones having no hope** (2:12d)
 - [d] **And Godless ones in the cosmos** (2:12e)
 - (b) **But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near** (2:13-14)
 - [1] **By the blood of Christ** (2:13b)
 - [2] **For He is our peace, the One making both one** (2:14)

- (2) [And that He changed our customs] (2:15-16)
 - (a) **And tearing down the dividing wall of hostility** (2:14c-16).
 - [1] **Through His flesh abolishing the enmity** (2:15a-15c)
 - [a] **The law** [made up] **of commandments** (2:15b)
 - [b] [Contained] **in ordinances** (2:15c)
 - [2] So that He might create in Himself one new man (2:15d-15f)
 - [a] **Out of the two** (2:15e)
 - [b] **Resulting in peace** (2:15f),
 - (b) **So that He might reconcile both to God in one body** (2:16)
 - [1] **Through the cross** (2:16b)
 - [2] **Putting to death the hostility through Himself** (2:16c).
- (3) [And that He changed the attitudes of both of us] (2:17-18)
 - (a) **And coming, He proclaimed the good news of peace** (2:17)
 - [1] **To those who were far away** (Gentiles) (2:17b)
 - [2] **And to those who were near** (Jews) (2:17c)
 - (b) **For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father** (2:18).

Paul then showed how the salvation Jesus provides produces changes in both Jews and Gentiles. Those changes resulted in bringing them together, even though they had been widely separated from each other for ages. He did it by bringing drastic changes to both of them. First, Paul showed how Jesus changed the relationships of Jews to Gentiles (vs. 11-14). Second, he showed how Jesus changed the customs of the Jews that stood as barriers between them and Gentiles. Third, he showed how Jesus changed the attitudes of both Jews and Gentiles toward each other

Verses 11-14. Jesus changed the relationships of Gentiles to Jews.

Barriers that separated Gentiles from Jews. Paul referred to two factors that stood as uncrossable barriers separating Gentiles from Jews. Those barriers were: circumcision and knowledge of Christ.

The first barrier that stood between Gentiles and Jews was circumcision. Paul demonstrated the seriousness of circumcision as a barrier by noting that circumcision was the name by which Jews referred to themselves and to Gentiles. The Jews called themselves “the circumcision,” and they called the Gentiles “the uncircumcision.”

Circumcision was extremely important to Jews, because God had given it to them as a sign of the covenant He made with them. Therefore, Jews

considered any uncircumcised male to be an outcast from God. That opinion was so strong that circumcision was the primary characteristic by which they identified the difference between them and Gentiles.

God had intended for circumcision to be a witness to the commitment of Abraham and his seed to the true God; however, the Jews had turned it into a means of separating them from all other people. They used it as a barrier to keep them away from the Gentiles. It had become a hindrance to God’s purpose for the Jews, not an aid to their service to God.

On the other hand, Gentiles considered circumcision as a mutilation of the body. They thought those who practiced it were strange and unwholesome. That attitude was so strong that they sought to exclude Jews from their athletic games and from public baths.

Gentiles thought they had an even deeper reason for rejecting the Jewish practice of circumcision and excusing their dislike for Jews. They rightly understood that circumcision involved more than just a surgical procedure. When a person accepted circumcision, he agreed to keep the whole Mosaic law. The requirements of the laws God gave at Sinai made a drastic change in the Jewish way of life and in their daily practices. Gentiles considered Jews to be foolish for keeping all of the minute requirements of the Mosaic law. To them

Jews were strange people, so the requirements of the law that were supposed to be a witness to the reality and goodness of God became customs and practices that caused the Gentiles to reject the testimony of the Jews about the true God.

Neither Jews nor Gentiles ever found any way to reconcile themselves with the practices of the other. The separation it produced made both loathe even to associate with the other. The Jews considered the Gentiles to be inferior because they did not practice the Mosaic law, and the Gentiles considered the Jews to be strange because they did keep those laws. Circumcision became a sign of that division. Circumcision and all it stood for was a massive separating factor between Jews and Gentiles.

While recognizing the importance of circumcision as a factor separating Jews and Gentiles, Paul still emphasized that it was a superficial factor. He did so by stressing that circumcision was only in the body and made by human hands. It was not an action carried out by God or even an action done by the human heart. It was supposed to be a sign of a heart commitment; but if it was not used in that way, it simply was a physical act that had no spiritual value. Real circumcision was a commitment of the heart. Without circumcision of the heart, physical circumcision was of no value.

The second factor that separated Jews and Gentiles was far more important. It was that the Gentiles were without Christ. Paul understood that Christ Jesus was present with the Israelites at Sinai and that He gave them the law through Moses. Therefore, when the Gentiles were without the symbolic practices God gave at Sinai, they were without Christ. That separation kept them away from all the blessings God planned for the Jews when they kept the requirements Jesus gave them at Sinai. In verse 12, Paul listed four of the blessings from which the Gentiles were excluded because they rejected the lifestyle God commanded at Sinai:

(a) It separated them from citizenship in Israel, the nation God chose and blessed with special blessings (v. 12b).

(b) It separated them from the covenants God made with the Jews, which provided them with a spiritual relationship with God (v. 12c).

(c) It separated them from hope, because the only ones who have any real hope for the future are those who know Israel's God (v. 12c).

(d) Most of all, it separated them from God Himself. The word Paul used to describe that last separation is literally "atheists." That word has a different connotation in English than it has in Hebrew. We use it to mean people who believe God does not exist. Paul used it to mean people who do not have a relationship with the true God. The Gentiles in Paul's day were far from believing God or gods did not exist. They believed in many gods and worshipped them actively. Paul called them "atheists" to mean that their gods were not the true God. Because they worshipped false gods, they were left godless, without a real God to bless them in the whole cosmos (v. 12d).

Jesus broke down the barriers and brought the Gentiles into fellowship with the Jews (vs. 13-14). Paul then trumpeted the great truth that now that gloomy condition had been corrected for the Ephesian Christians. They had been brought near to God, and when they were brought near to God they were brought near to God's nation the Jews. He accomplished that wonder by giving the Gentiles wonderful gifts that He also gave to the Jews. Those gifts that they shared were far more significant than anything that could keep them apart. Through Jesus, the Gentiles had more to draw them together with Jews than they had to drive them apart. The result was that former enemies became friends.

Paul mentioned two blessings that Jesus gave the Gentiles as to Jews. When Gentiles as well as Jews enjoyed those blessings, they had so much to share together that the differences between did not exist anymore.

The first blessing Paul mentioned that Jesus gave to Gentiles to share with the Jews was His death on the Cross. He said the Gentiles had been brought near to the Jews by the blood of Christ (v. 13b). It was the death of Jesus on the Cross that

made all the difference, because Jesus shed His blood and gave His life for everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike. His death gave the Gentiles the greatest of all blessings to share and share alike with the Jews. It gave Gentiles and Jews more in common with each other and more to draw them together than any separating factor could ever be.

The second blessing Paul mentioned that Jesus gave to Gentiles to share with the Jews was that He became their peace (v. 14). He accomplished that wonder by making both Gentiles and Jews to be members of one body. He created a new body of believers and gave them equal shares in that body. Sharing in the same body gave them a great cause to support together. It made all their differences too small a matter to quarrel over. Jesus personally became the Peace-maker by coming to earth to form His new body of believers and give both Jews and Gentiles a share in it. No other person and no other activity could have accomplished it, so He performed the act Himself and made Gentiles and Jews so much a part of each other that they had nothing left to quarrel about.

The salvation Jesus gave changed completely the relationship of Gentiles to Jews. No longer were they opposing armies. Now Gentiles are part of the one body of Christ in the world.

Verses 15-16. Jesus changed the customs of the Jews. Jesus changed the Jews in a way that was equally radical as the way He changed the Gentiles. He changed the law by which the Jews lived. Changing the law completely changed Jewish customs and the Jews' distinctive way of life.

The dividing wall that caused the Jews to isolate themselves from the Gentiles was the system of law that God gave to them at Sinai. That law commanded the Israelites to live a distinctive lifestyle to demonstrate their loyalty to Him. The Jews had distorted that law by using it as a sign that God loved them alone. They took it as an indication they were to hold themselves aloof from all others. Quite to the contrary, God had intended it to be a means of drawing others in. Instead, the Jews were using it as a means of keeping others out. Therefore, the Jews hated the Gentiles because they did not have the distinctive way of life God had

revealed at Sinai. At the same time, Gentiles hated the Jews because of the pride their distinctive way of life produced in them. God had given the law for a good purpose. Both Jews and Gentiles were using it for an evil purpose. It had become a separating wall, keeping Jews and Gentiles from communicating with others. It kept Jews from sharing their faith in the true God. It kept Gentiles from being willing to listen to the Jews' witness to the true God. It needed to be changed. Jesus did not just tinker with it. He abolished it.

Since God gave the law to the Israelites, only God could take it away. But Jesus is God, with authority to reinterpret and change the law in any way He wished. Jesus did just that, but He did not just cancel the law. He instituted a superior substitute for it. In the place of all the rituals of the laws of Sinai, Jesus substituted His death on the Cross. When He did so, the ritual laws of Sinai were no longer needed. He had abolished them by providing something far better.

When Jesus made himself an offering to cover men from their sins, He replaced all five fire-offerings God taught Israel to offer on the tabernacle or temple altar. When Jesus offered Himself willingly on the Cross, He replaced the entire Jewish priesthood. When Jesus gave His life at Calvary and opened the way for God to live in believers' hearts constantly, He took away all need for a temple or dwelling-place for God made of stones and gold and gems. When Jesus shed His blood to provide the power for cleansing people from sin, He replaced every law on clean, unclean, and cleansings that God gave at Sinai. When Jesus' death and resurrection turned every day into a life of celebrating God's victories, He made obsolete every feast day and every celebration day God taught at Sinai, so that they are needed no more. It took Moses 40 years to receive all of God's laws in the wilderness. It took the Israelites 1,200 years to totally fail in their attempt to live those laws. It took Jesus six hours on the Cross to cancel and replace them all.

When Jesus abolished the laws of Sinai, He did away with the wall that separated Jews and Gentiles. Through His death on the Cross, He abolished the great dividing barrier between them

and enabled them to become united into one new kind of man. That new humanity brought peace between Jews and Gentiles. It fused them together into one body and killed the hostility that had existed previously between them. Jesus accomplished it all by substituting His death on the Cross for all the Sinai laws. He made them all obsolete.

Through the Cross Jesus reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God and formed them into one body of believers all over the world. When He did so, He put the enmity between them to death. It died with Him on the Cross. He accomplished it all through His own personal action. It cost Him His life, but it produced life for everyone who would believe in Him, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Verses 17-18. Jesus changed the attitudes of both Jews and Gentiles toward each other. The third change Jesus made in Jews and Gentiles affected them both. It was the most dramatic and the most significant change of all. He changed the attitude of each of them toward the other. Jesus did two bold and breathtaking actions to bring about that change in attitude of both of them.

The first way that Jesus changed the attitude of Jews and Gentiles to each other was that He left His exalted throne in heaven and came to earth to announce and explain to both Jews and Gentiles the new peace He provided (vs. 17). Paul said Jesus proclaimed that message to “those who were far away and to those who were near.” The Gentiles had been far away in that they had always worshipped false gods and rejected the true God. They were not far away because God would not accept them but because they would not accept God. The Jews had been near in that the truth of God had been proclaimed to them for thousands of years, and the way of God had been familiar to them from the days of Abraham. Still they had never truly accepted it as a nation, and they needed the message of love and peace that Jesus came to give as much as the Gentiles needed it. Therefore, Jesus came personally to earth to proclaim to both groups the great message of love and peace. What He came to earth to teach was the best good news ever spoken in the world. However, He did much more than just teach it. He lived it Himself, and He

changed people’s hearts so that they were able to love others instead of hating them. By His personal presence in the world and by His ability to enter into people’s hearts and minds, He went far beyond changing the relationships of Jews and Gentiles. He changed them into a new kind of people, with new attitudes that focused on love instead of law.

Jesus spent most of His ministry with the Jews because they were best prepared to understand His message and to pass it on to others; but the four Gospels clearly tell of times when Jesus also taught, ministered, and worked miracles among the Gentiles. Even more importantly, after He had taught the new way to the Israelites, He sent out those who accepted Him to spread that message to all the nations of the world. Jesus did not reveal that new message of peace through the prophets. He did not send that message of peace to people everywhere through angels. He came Himself to introduce it and to command those who accepted it to spread it to everyone everywhere. He lived that message, taught it, empowered people to practice it, and then commanded His followers to pass it on. He brought Jews and Gentiles together by personally coming and instituting a new approach to worshipping and serving God and then sending out His followers to share it with the whole world.

The second way Jesus changed the attitudes of Jews and Gentiles toward each other was by sending the Holy Spirit to give both of them the same access to the one Father God (v.18). He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell all who believe, including both Jews and Gentiles. Through the Holy Spirit Jews and Gentiles have same way to approach God, the same task to perform for God, and the same empowerment to accomplish that task. He expects Jews and Gentiles to be so busy working together that they do not have time to find something to fight about

When Paul spoke of the work of the Holy Spirit, He mentioned all three members of the Trinity in one statement. He said through Jesus both Jews and Gentiles have access by one Spirit to the Father. The Spirit’s ministry is through Jesus because Jesus sent Him to continue His work. The Spirit’s ministry accomplishes the will of the Father, because He guides and empowers believers to accomplish the work the Father gave them to do.

Paul's statement gives insight into the harmonious way that all three members of the Trinity assume distinct roles and yet work harmoniously together as one to accomplish one purpose. Their marvelous unity is our supreme example of how we also should work together as one.

Because Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit work together to bring salvation and peace to people everywhere, Jews and Gentiles have available to them both an example and a power to have one

harmonious fellowship of love and service. That fellowship between former enemies demonstrates the oneness that is in God Himself and gives assurance that in the End the triune God will bring all things everywhere into the same kind of harmonious unity and make it last forever. The only ones who will be excluded from the final unity will be those who chose not to come into the fellowship by rejecting Jesus.

- f. [The end result of salvation is that it unites Jews and Gentiles into one citizenship, one family, and one holy temple] (2:19-22)
- (1) ***So then you are no longer foreigners and sojourners,*** (2:19a):
 - (2) ***But (2:19b-22)***
 - (a) ***Fellow citizens with the saints*** (2:19c)
 - (b) ***And members of God's household*** (2:19d)
 - (c) ***And*** [portions of God's holy temple] (2:20-22)
 - [1] [The structure of God's dwelling-place] (2:20b-20c)
 - [a] ***Are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*** (2:20b)
 - [b] ***With Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone*** (2:20c),
 - [2] [The builder of God's dwelling-place] (2:21)
 - [a] ***By whom the whole building is being fitted together*** (2:21a)
 - [b] ***And is growing into a holy temple in the Lord*** (2:21b)
 - [3] [The unity of God's dwelling-place] (2:22)
 - [a] ***By whom you (Gentiles) also [along with us Jews] are being incorporated into God's dwelling-place*** (2:22a)
 - [b] ***By the Spirit*** (2:22b).

.Paul came finally to the topic of the end result of salvation, which is that it unites Jews and Gentiles into one harmonious relationship. He told what had divided them through the years and how Jesus overcame the dividing factors and brought them together.

Verse 19a. Two estrangements from which Jews and Gentiles have been rescued. First Paul described two separating factors that had kept Jews and Gentiles apart for a millennium and a half. Paul said the two factors were that they the Gentiles were foreigners and sojourners to the Jews. Paul stated that the distinctions no longer were applicable, but they were not small problems. It took Jesus Himself to overcome them.

Foreigners. A foreigner is a person of another nation. He might be a temporary visitor in someone

else's land, but he is of a different nationality or ethnicity from those among whom he visits or lives. He has different loyalties and different customs. He often speaks a different language. For many reasons, he is strange and hard to understand. Formerly Jews and Gentiles had been true foreigners to each other. They not only were different from each other and did not understand each other, they also did not like each other. Their feelings were so strong that they actually hated each other, and Jews would not eat with Gentiles or enter their homes unless it absolutely could not be avoided. Jesus completely did away with that distant relationship. Jews and Gentiles are no longer foreigners. Jesus overcame their hostilities by making them both citizens of a new kingdom, the kingdom of God. When Jews and Gentiles share citizenship in the same kingdom, they learn to think alike, talk alike, and live alike. They have

been given a new common citizenship that makes all their differences insignificant.

Sojourners. A sojourner is a person who resides in a country where he is not a citizen. He may have lived in a foreign land for a long time, but he has never been accepted as a citizen of that land, and he still has his main loyalties elsewhere. He may have learned the ways of the people among whom he lives, but he has never made himself one of them. He is a resident but still an alien. Formerly many Jews and Gentiles had been forced into that kind of relationship. Wars and banishments had scattered them across the world. As a result Jews lived in many lands other than Israel. Likewise people from other nations had come to live in Israel for many reasons. People of other nationalities even ruled over the Israelites. However, even those rulers were resident aliens, no matter how long they had lived among the Jews. Many Jews and Gentiles maintained that kind of physically near but socially distant for centuries. However, through Jesus that kind of distant relationship has vanished away. They are no longer strange and aloof from each other. They have come to belong to each other. Jesus has brought both into His spiritual kingdom, and their common citizenship has overcome all the differences that formerly were so important to them.

Jesus made the relationships of foreigners and sojourners insignificant by making them both citizens in one eternal kingdom. He removed those barriers by giving Jews and Gentiles blessings to share together that far outweighed the differences that existed between them. Just because some Jews and some Gentiles reject Jesus and refuse to accept the new way He came to offer does not take away the reality that the new unity He came to give is real in those who trust Him. The old hostile relationships are gone, even if some will not believe it.

Verses 19b-22 -- Three relationships into which Jesus united Jews and Gentiles. Paul listed three relationships into which Jesus unites Gentiles and Jews.

First, Paul said Jesus makes both Jews and Gentiles to share the same citizenship. They have

become members of the same nation. The nation that now unites all of God's people is no longer Israel, but the Kingdom of God. They may still be citizens of different earthly nations, but they now have a citizenship that is far more important and significant than their nationalities. They are citizens of heaven and strangers on the earth. Therefore, through Jesus, Jews and Gentiles may hold different nationalities, but they are united with a much stronger citizenship than loyalty to any earthly nation. Jesus has united Jews and Gentiles into one spiritual kingdom and given them one spiritual citizenship that outweighs all others and will last forever.

Second, Jesus makes Jews and Gentiles members of the same household. That one household is the family of God. All those who truly accept Jesus as Savior become His brothers, and Jesus' Father becomes their Father. The family that now unites God's people is no longer Abraham's family, but God's family. They are not physically related, but they have a far more significant relationship. They are spiritually related, and their hearts are inseparably knit with each other. They understand each other, like each other, and share the same desires and goals. They have a kinship that is deeper and stronger than any blood relationship or any genetic kinship on the earth. They have a spiritual relationship that joins them into family ties that will never be broken.

Third, Jesus forms Jews and Gentiles into one holy temple. For Jews, the temple in Jerusalem symbolically was considered to be God's dwelling-place, and wherever a Jew lived He symbolically directed His prayers toward the temple in Jerusalem. After Jesus came that symbol was no longer needed. Jesus made for Himself a dwelling-place from which He never can be driven away. Today Jesus' dwelling-place is the hearts and lives of His people. Together believers compose the dwelling-place or temple of God. The dwelling-place of God is no longer a physical structure in the Sinai Peninsula or in the city of Jerusalem. Instead, it is the hearts and lives of those who believe in Jesus. A physical temple is no longer needed by God's people. His temple is within their hearts, and all followers of Jesus are joined together into one

body, called the church. Therefore, Jesus temple and His church are one and the same.

Paul elaborated more on the way Jews and Gentiles are united into one temple than on the other two ways Jews and Gentiles are united.

The foundation of God's temple. Paul's statement about uniting Jews and Gentiles into one dwelling-place for God is built on statements Jesus made to His disciples near Caesarea Philippi concerning how He was going to build His church. Jesus' statements are recorded in Matthew 16:18. He said to Peter, "***And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church . . .***" (KJV). That passage has been interpreted in very diverse ways and has been the source of much division among Christian churches. However, when it is read in a straight-forward way like Jesus said it, it is a clear and unambiguous statement.

Jesus made that statement after complimenting Peter for recognizing that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Because of that confession, Jesus called Peter a rock, by which He meant Peter was developing into a person with strong, stable, rock-like character. Then Jesus said He was going to build His church upon that rock. Through faith, Peter was developing his spiritual strength until it was great enough for Jesus to build upon him. Jesus made it clear that what He was going to build on Peter was His church.

Paul's words in Ephesians 2:20-22 throw a great deal of light on what Jesus meant when He spoke those words to Peter. Paul actually was giving a divinely inspired interpretation of the meaning of Jesus' statement. If we would just accept Paul's interpretation, it would settle all the disputes about Jesus' meaning.

Some have said that by His statement to Peter Jesus was appointing Peter to be the head of His church. The pope of Rome bases his claim to have authority over the world-wide church on that one statement. However, that interpretation of Jesus' statement is a strange twisting of words. Two factors show that interpretation to be completely erroneous.

(1) The first factor is that Jesus said He was going to build His church. Even though He compliments Peter highly, He definitely did not give Peter the responsibility of building His church. Jesus said He was going to build His church Himself. He said Peter was a rock on which He was going to build His church, but Jesus plainly stated that He Himself was going to do the building. Interpreters have exhausted vocabulary in an attempt to explain what Jesus meant by the rock, but they have ignored what Jesus said about who the Builder was going to be. Jesus said He was going to do the building, and that statement should clarify forever who has authority over the church. Jesus' authority to build His church Himself eliminates the possibility that any one man anywhere can ever be the church's head.

(2) The second factor is that Jesus said Peter was a rock and that He was going to build His church on that rock. A rock upon which a building is built is the foundation on which the building is erected. Jesus' statement is clear that He was going to use the rock to which He was referring as a foundation stone for His church. A foundation is underneath a structure, not above it. The rock to which Jesus was referring was going to be underneath His church, not at the top of it or over it. "Build upon" cannot rightly be twisted to mean "place over." The rock was Peter, but Peter was going to be a foundation stone, not a head master.

Nothing in Jesus' statement even hints that Peter or anyone else was going to the head of His church, much less that that person was going to have the authority to pass that position on to others.

Others have said that Jesus meant He was going to build His church, not on Peter, but on Peter's faith. That interpretation has been supported by Protestants as a counterbalance to the Catholic interpretation. It is an attractive idea to people who reject the teaching that Jesus made Peter to be a pope, but it also twists and changes what Jesus said. Jesus definitely said that Peter was a rock and that He was going to build on that rock. The wording clearly means that Jesus was going to build on Peter. He was going to use Peter in the foundation of His church. Jesus builds His work in this world out of and upon people. We should not take away

from Peter the honor of being used as a part of the foundation on which Jesus was and is building His church.

The Catholic interpretation makes too much of Jesus' statement by claiming more authority for Peter than any person can bear. The Protestant interpretation makes too little of it by denying that Jesus uses people in building His work, not just principles. A better interpretation of Jesus' word is needed, and Paul's statements in Ephesians 2:20-22 help us understand that better interpretation.

Paul said that God's temple or dwelling-place was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Peter was both an apostle and a prophet. Comparing Paul's statement with Jesus' statement shows that Peter was one of the rocks in the foundation Jesus was laying for His church. Peter was not the only rock in the foundation, but he was the kind of rock Jesus was using to build His church.

Jesus' words to Peter were like a man who holds a brick in his hand and says, "I am going to build my house out of this brick." The man does not mean he is going to build his whole house out of that one brick. He means he is going to build his house out of that kind of brick. In the same way, Jesus meant the building material He was going to use to lay the foundation for His church was not sandstone or limestone or marble or granite. It was Peter and other men like Peter, whose shifting lives had been turned into a rock-like character by the power of God. He was going to build them into a foundation so strong that He was going to be able to keep on building on it until His return.

Paul went on to say that the cornerstone for Jesus' temple was Jesus Himself. According to the construction methods of that day, the cornerstone was a vital part of a building's foundation. It was a massive stone that was placed at the corner that bore the greatest load of the building. It held together the rest of the foundation, and it held up a major portion of the weight of the walls that were built on that foundation. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, expanded the word picture Jesus drew of His church. He declared that Jesus did not just use Peter and the other apostles and prophets to form

the foundation for His church. He Himself was going to be a part of that foundation. In fact, he was the strongest and most important part of that foundation. He was the Cornerstone that held the rest of the foundation together and gave it sufficient strength to hold up the whole superstructure He still is building on that foundation. Jesus Himself is the major reason the church He is building is so strong that it never will enter through the gates of hades and die.

The superstructure of Jesus' temple. Paul's statement went beyond speaking of the foundation of Jesus' temple. He placed even greater emphasis on the superstructure Jesus was building on that foundation. Jesus continues to build on that foundation, and Jesus' temple and church continue to grow day by day. Troubles come, and Satan never slackens in his fight against Jesus church, but he never has been able to stop the expansion of Jesus' church. He never will.

In building the superstructure of His church, Jesus is using the same material He used to lay the foundation. That building material is people who develop a rock-like character through faith and obedience to Him. They are people who are strong enough in faith to stand all the stress and pressure that is thrown against them. Jesus is using rock-like people today to enlarge and expand the church that still rests on the foundation He built out of the apostles and prophets who followed Him while He was on earth and out of Himself as well.

The climax of Paul's statement was that Jesus was incorporating the Gentiles into the temple He was building. He was including the Gentiles as an integral part of it. Gentile believers were not a separate group or a separate church or a separate temple or a separate dwelling-place for God. They were parts of the one temple Jesus was building and still is building for Himself. Jesus lives in the hearts of Gentile believers as much as in the hearts of Jewish believers. Thus, He includes Gentile believers into the structure of His dwelling-place, right along with Jewish believers. He is building Jews and Gentiles together into one dwelling-place, where He lives today and through which He is present over all the earth. He lives all over the earth, because He lives in His people who live all

over the earth. Those people include all Jews and all Gentiles who believe in Him.

Paul began his statement about building the superstructure of God's dwelling-place by saying "by whom," referring to Jesus (v. 21). He meant that God's temple was being built by Jesus. In making that statement, Paul agreed with Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:18 that Jesus Himself was building His church. However, Paul ended his statement by saying, "by the Spirit" (v. 22). By those words, he declared that God's temple was being built by the Holy Spirit. No conflict exists between those two statements. God's temple, the church, is being built up and enlarged as much by the work of the Holy Spirit as by the work of Jesus. It requires both, because They are both One. They work together to build a church in which They combine together all kinds of people everywhere and bind them together into one united fellowship for the glory of God. Jesus and the Holy Spirit work together to build in the world a fellowship that has a unity modeled after Their own fellowship. They are One, so they can work together to combine both Jews and Gentiles together into one temple.

Verses 19-22. The significance of the unity of Jews and Gentiles. The point Paul was stressing

throughout this section was that Jesus has brought Jews and Gentiles together so perfectly that they now form one people group, one family, and one home for God Himself. The oneness Jesus achieved between Jews and Gentiles is so astonishing it is one of history's greatest miracles.

As marvelous as that truth is, Paul used it as an example of an even more marvelous unity that Jesus will achieve someday. In the End, Jesus is going to bring together into one harmonious unity every believer, every creature, and every physical object everywhere in the whole cosmos. In fact, even heaven and earth will be joined together into one universal fellowship into which not one ripple of disharmony will ever enter again.

Paul's used the unity that Jesus and the Holy Spirit have given to Jews and Gentiles as the basis for His insight that at the End of the ages Jesus and the Holy Spirit will work together to bring into being an even greater unity. They will bring about an all-inclusive unity that will combine all things in heaven and on earth into one harmonious comradeship that will never again be broken.