

# Homiletics Analysis: Ephesians 2:1–22

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## Content & Intent

### **This Text — Content:**

Ephesians 2 moves in two great sweeps, both structured around the same redemptive logic. The first (vv. 1–10) describes the human condition before God’s intervention — spiritual death, enslavement to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and existence under divine wrath — and then narrates God’s sovereign act of making the dead alive in Christ, raising them, and seating them with Him in the heavenly places, all by grace through faith, not by works. The second sweep (vv. 11–22) applies the same logic to the Jew-Gentile divide: Gentiles were once “far off,” strangers to the covenants of promise, without God and without hope — but Christ’s blood has abolished the dividing wall of hostility, creating one new humanity in Himself, reconciling both to God in one body through the cross, and building together a holy temple in which God dwells by His Spirit. The chapter does not offer two separate doctrines — it presents one gospel doing two inseparable things: raising the dead and reconciling the divided.

### **This Text — Intent:**

God is seeking to shatter every remaining ground for human pride while simultaneously demolishing every remaining ground for despair. The Ephesian readers — largely Gentile, conscious of their former exclusion — needed to be stunned by the totality of what grace accomplished and the security of what they now possess. The intent is double-edged: first, to produce doxological astonishment that God would do *this* for people who were *that*; and second, to produce a corresponding humility that utterly forecloses boasting and reshapes how the church relates to itself, to God, and to the fractured world around it. The chapter drives toward a community that lives as though the cross actually did what it said — raised the dead, demolished the wall, built the temple.

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### **Subject Sentence:**

Grace alone — through Christ alone — raises the spiritually dead and unites the permanently divided into one new humanity.

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### **Primary Claim:**

God is demonstrating, against every human assumption about status, merit, and division, that His grace in Christ is the *sole* basis of both the sinner’s standing before Him and the

church's unity with one another — so that no one may boast, and so that the church may live as the visible proof of the gospel's power.

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## Interpretive Evaluation

### On “dead in trespasses and sins” (vv. 1–3) — the extent of spiritual inability:

The Reformed reading takes the death metaphor with full seriousness: the unregenerate person is not sick, not weakened, not in need of assistance — they are dead, and the dead do not cooperate in their own resurrection. The syntax of vv. 4–5 confirms this: God “made us alive *together with Christ*” while we were dead — the initiative is entirely divine.

Arminian and Wesleyan readings typically invoke prevenient grace here: God grants a universal enablement that restores spiritual capacity prior to faith, so that the person's response remains genuinely self-determining. This reading must be acknowledged as an honest attempt to honor both divine sovereignty and human responsibility, but it imports a prior theological commitment that the text itself does not supply. The word “dead” in v. 1 is not qualified, and vv. 4–5 locate the entirety of the life-giving act in God's mercy and love — not in a prior enabling that makes human response possible. The Reformed reading does not deny human responsibility; it relocates the origin of faith entirely in God's initiative while preserving the genuine, non-coerced nature of belief.

### On “not by works, so that no one may boast” (vv. 8–10) — the scope of the exclusion:

Roman Catholic interpretation acknowledges that initial justification is by grace and not earned by prior meritorious works, but typically argues that the “works” excluded here are specifically *pre-faith* Mosaic works, leaving room for post-justification merit through formed charity and sacramental cooperation. This reading must be *refuted* on two grounds. First, the exclusion in v. 9 is absolute and structural — “not of works” is paired with “so that no one may boast,” which is a universal human category, not a Jewish-specific category. Second, v. 10 — “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works” — positions good works as the *result* of salvation, not any part of its basis, and the phrase “which God prepared beforehand” grounds even the subsequent works entirely in divine predetermination, further closing the door to merit. Luther's insight here is exegetically sound: the exclusion of boasting is the functional test for any view of salvation — if it permits boasting at any point, it has departed from Paul's logic.

### On the “dividing wall of hostility” (vv. 14–16) — scope of what Christ abolished:

Dispensational readings typically restrict the “wall” to the Mosaic ceremonial law and insist that the Jew-Gentile distinction remains operative in God's future program, with national Israel still receiving a distinct redemptive-historical fulfillment. This is worth *qualifying* rather than outright refuting. Paul does specify the “law of commandments expressed in ordinances” (v. 15) as the mechanism of the division's abolition, which does point to the Mosaic economy. However, the *goal* Paul states is “one new man” (v. 15) and

“one body” (v. 16) — a new corporate entity that transcends rather than merely integrates the old categories. The Reformed and broadly evangelical reading is preferred: Christ has not merely *suspended* the distinction for the church age while preserving it for a future program; He has *created* something genuinely new in which the old Jew-Gentile binary no longer defines identity before God. This does not require denying God’s faithfulness to Israel’s covenant promises (see Romans 9–11), but it does insist that the church is not a parenthesis — it is the intended culmination of the promise to Abraham.

### On vv. 8–9 — whether “faith” is itself the gift:

A minor but persistent Reformed debate: is “this” (*touto*) in v. 8 (“this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”) referring to faith specifically, or to the whole salvation complex (grace + faith + salvation)? Arminian interpreters typically argue that grammatically, *touto* (neuter) cannot directly refer to *pistis* (feminine — faith), and therefore the gift is salvation, not faith itself — preserving faith as a human contribution. This should be *qualified*: the grammatical argument has some force. However, the broader argument of Ephesians 2 — especially vv. 4–5, where God acts unilaterally on the dead — and the parallel in Philippians 1:29 (“it has been granted to you... to believe”) strongly support the conclusion that Paul intends faith itself to be part of the divine gift, even if *touto* refers to the whole complex. The neuter may function as a cataphoric summarizer of everything stated in vv. 8a–b, in which faith and salvation are together the divinely granted reality. The Reformed reading does not depend on this grammatical point alone — it is supported by the entire argument.

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## Key Canonical Support

- **Romans 3:21–26** — Paul’s concentrated statement that justification is by faith apart from works of the law, with God as both the just and the justifier; provides the forensic grounding for Ephesians 2’s narrative account of salvation.
  - **Genesis 15:1–21** — God’s unilateral covenant with Abram, sealed by divine oath while Abram slept; the Old Testament type of salvation by divine initiative alone, which Paul reads as the gospel announced beforehand (Galatians 3:8).
  - **Ezekiel 37:1–14** — The valley of dry bones: God’s act of breathing life into the dead; the closest Old Testament parallel to Ephesians 2:1–5 and the prophetic background Paul likely assumes.
  - **Galatians 3:26–29** — “Neither Jew nor Greek... for you are all one in Christ Jesus”; the direct parallel to Ephesians 2:11–22, establishing that the one-new-humanity theme is not unique to Ephesians but belongs to Paul’s core gospel logic.
  - **1 Peter 2:4–10** — The church as “living stones” built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood; a parallel development of the temple metaphor of Ephesians 2:19–22, grounding the church’s identity in corporate, priestly, and architectural terms.
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**Aim:**

To demonstrate that God's grace in Christ is the *total* explanation for both the believer's standing before God and the church's reconciled unity — and that this double truth is meant to produce a community of doxological humility that lives as the visible evidence of the gospel's power.

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## Content Table

| Verse(s) | Content                                                                                                                                                  | Notes                                                                                                                                          |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2:1      | Direct address: "you were dead in your trespasses and sins"                                                                                              | The "you" is the Gentile readers; death is the controlling metaphor — not illness or weakness                                                  |
| 2:2      | The dead walk according to: (1) the course of this world; (2) the prince of the power of the air; (3) the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience | Three overlapping domains of enslavement: cosmic, Satanic, internal                                                                            |
| 2:3      | "We all" — Paul includes himself — lived in the passions of the flesh, carrying out desires of the body and mind; were by nature children of wrath       | The shift to "we all" universalizes; "by nature" forecloses the idea that this is a habit that can be overcome by effort                       |
| 2:4      | "But God" — the turning point of the chapter and of human history                                                                                        | Two attributes named: rich in mercy, great love; the initiative is entirely divine                                                             |
| 2:5      | Even while dead, God made us alive together with Christ                                                                                                  | "Even while dead" — no cooperating capacity; grace is parenthetical: "by grace you have been saved"                                            |
| 2:6      | Raised us up and seated us with Christ in the heavenly places                                                                                            | The three "togethers" (made alive, raised, seated) unite the believer's position with Christ's accomplished work — past tense, present reality |
| 2:7      | Purpose: to show in the coming ages the immeasurable riches of His                                                                                       | The church is God's exhibit of grace in the cosmic courtroom — for eternity                                                                    |

| Verse(s) | Content                                                                                                                                                                             | Notes                                                                                                                                             |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2:8–9    | For by grace you have been saved through faith — not of yourselves, not of works — so that no one may boast                                                                         | The concentrated doctrinal summary; the triple exclusion of human contribution; the boast-prevention as the functional criterion                  |
| 2:10     | We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand                                                                                        | The positive counterpart: not saved by works; saved <i>for</i> works; even those works are divinely prepared                                      |
| 2:11     | Remember: you were Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called “the circumcision”                                                                          | The command to remember grounds the following contrast; the distancing quotation marks signal Paul’s evaluation of ethnic pride                   |
| 2:12     | At that time: (1) separated from Christ; (2) alienated from the commonwealth of Israel; (3) strangers to the covenants of promise; (4) having no hope; (5) without God in the world | Five-fold description of Gentile exclusion — comprehensive and devastating                                                                        |
| 2:13     | “But now” — the second turning point; in Christ Jesus, those who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ                                                         | The structural parallel to “but God” in v. 4; blood = the means of near-bringing                                                                  |
| 2:14     | He Himself is our peace; has made both groups one; broken down the dividing wall of hostility                                                                                       | Peace is not a condition but a Person; the wall’s destruction is accomplished, not in progress                                                    |
| 2:15     | Abolished in His flesh the law of commandments expressed in ordinances; to create in Himself one new man in place of the two                                                        | The mechanism: the law’s condemning and separating power is absorbed in Christ’s body; the goal: one new humanity, not two groups managed side by |

| Verse(s) | Content                                                                                                            | Notes                                                                                                                                  |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          |                                                                                                                    | side                                                                                                                                   |
| 2:16     | Reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility                                 | Reconciliation is vertical (to God) and horizontal (to each other) — and they are accomplished in the same act                         |
| 2:17     | He came and preached peace to those who were far off and peace to those who were near                              | An echo of Isaiah 57:19; Christ's proclamation extends to both groups                                                                  |
| 2:18     | Through Him both have access in one Spirit to the Father                                                           | Trinitarian structure of access: through the Son, by the Spirit, to the Father                                                         |
| 2:19     | Therefore: no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God | The status reversal is complete; two metaphors: political (citizens) and familial (household)                                          |
| 2:20     | Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone                   | The foundation is the apostolic-prophetic Word; the cornerstone is Christ — the stone that determines every angle and bears every load |
| 2:21     | In Him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord                             | The temple is both architectural (built) and organic (grows) — the tension is intentional                                              |
| 2:22     | In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit                               | The readers are included in the cosmic construction; the temple's purpose is divine habitation                                         |

## Divisions Table

| Division | Verses | Label                                                |
|----------|--------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1        | 2:1–3  | The Condition: Dead, Enslaved, and Under Wrath       |
| 2        | 2:4–7  | The Intervention: God's Sovereign Act of Life-Giving |

| Division | Verses  | Label                                                                     |
|----------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3        | 2:8–10  | Grace<br>The Doctrinal Anchor: Grace Through Faith, Not Works — For Works |
| 4        | 2:11–13 | The Former Exclusion: Gentiles Far Off, Without Hope, Without God         |
| 5        | 2:14–18 | The Reconciling Work: Christ as Our Peace, Abolishing the Wall            |
| 6        | 2:19–22 | The New Reality: One Household, One Temple, God Dwelling Within           |

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## Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

**Subject Sentence:** Grace alone — through Christ alone — raises the spiritually dead and unites the permanently divided into one new humanity.

**Primary Claim:** God is demonstrating, against every human assumption about status, merit, and division, that His grace in Christ is the *sole* basis of both the sinner’s standing before Him and the church’s unity with one another — so that no one may boast, and so that the church may live as the visible proof of the gospel’s power.

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## Applications (Five)

**1. (Mind/Belief) — Reframe your past as the measure of grace, not the measure of shame.**

Ephesians 2:1–3 does not allow you to soften your diagnosis — dead, enslaved, wrathful by nature — but it frames that description not as the final word but as the backdrop against which God’s “but God” (v. 4) becomes fully visible. The worse you were, the greater the grace that reached you. This is not license; it is orientation. Every believer who has truly reckoned with vv. 1–3 has a deepened, not diminished, gratitude — because they know what was dead, and they know Who raised it. Stop minimizing your past condition to make grace more palatable; the full weight of the diagnosis is what makes the “but God” doxologically overwhelming.

**2. (Affections/Worship) — Let the “but God” of verse 4 be the hinge on which your emotional life swings.**

There are two words in Ephesians 2 that function as the axis of human history: “but God” (v. 4) and “but now” (v. 13). Every time the reader reaches the depths of vv. 1–3 and vv. 11–12 — the catalog of death, enslavement, exclusion, and hopelessness — they are being set up, not defeated. The pattern is deliberate: you were this; but God. You were that; but now. Believers who have learned to find God at the bottom of their lowest self-assessments — not as an escape from the diagnosis but as the answer to it — have discovered the affective engine of Pauline doxology. Let the “but God” produce in you what Paul intended: not relief that the bad news is over, but astonishment that God acted at all, and worship that it was *you* He acted toward.

**3. (Mind/Belief) — Refuse every version of Christianity that turns good works into a basis for standing before God.**

Verses 8–10 are architecturally precise: saved by grace, through faith, not of works (vv. 8–9) — created *for* good works, which God prepared beforehand (v. 10). These are not two stages of the same process, nor a balance between divine and human contribution. They are a sequence in which the second is entirely the fruit of the first, and even the second is divinely prepared. Any version of the Christian life that introduces works — however pious, however sincere — into the basis of your standing before God has collapsed the architecture Paul has built here. This is not a peripheral concern; it is the passage’s controlling logic, announced in v. 9 with the phrase “so that no one may boast.” If your works are securing anything for you before God, something other than grace is functioning as your standing — and Paul will not permit it.

**4. (Will/Behavior) — Treat every division in the church as a public contradiction of the gospel you claim to believe.**

Ephesians 2:14 says Christ “is our peace” — not that He *provides* peace between divided groups, but that He *is* it, in His own person, in His own body on the cross (v. 16). When believers who share the same “but God” and the same blood-brought near-drawing treat each other as aliens or adversaries — across racial lines, cultural lines, socioeconomic lines, tribal church-culture lines — they are functionally denying that Christ accomplished what this chapter says He accomplished. The wall was not weakened; it was broken down. The hostility was not managed; it was killed. The church that tolerates its divisions as though they are natural and inevitable is living below the accomplished reality of the cross. Name a specific division you are participating in — through avoidance, contempt, or tribal loyalty — and bring it under the verdict of Ephesians 2:14–16.

**5. (Affections/Worship) — Live with the conscious awareness that you are the place where God dwells.**

The closing image of Ephesians 2 — the church as a growing temple, the dwelling place of God by His Spirit (vv. 21–22) — is not metaphor designed to produce warm feelings about community. It is a claim about what the church *is* in the world: the place where the holy God has taken up residence. This was the telos of the entire Old Testament temple theology — that God would dwell with His people — and Paul says it is now being fulfilled

in the assembled body of believers. To receive this is to receive a completely different account of what happens when the church gathers: not a religious meeting that God may attend, but the habitation of God into which members are being built. Let this reshape both your expectation for gathered worship and your affection for the community that is, together, the temple not made with hands.

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## Theological Importance

### **Theological Importance:**

Ephesians 2 provides the most concentrated biblical account of the total sovereignty of grace in salvation and the total sufficiency of Christ's atoning work to accomplish both vertical reconciliation (sinners to God) and horizontal reconciliation (estranged human beings to one another). The passage establishes that human beings are not merely flawed or spiritually underperforming — they are dead, which means the entire initiative of salvation must originate outside the human being and enter from above. God's act in vv. 4–7 is not assistance to human effort; it is resurrection. This grounding in death-and-resurrection logic means that salvation is not a cooperative project — it is a divine monergism expressed in love, and its purpose is not merely human benefit but cosmic display: "in the coming ages" God intends to exhibit the immeasurable riches of His grace through the church (v. 7). The second movement (vv. 11–22) extends this theology into ecclesiology: the same cross that satisfies divine justice also demolishes human division, and the same Spirit who raises the dead also indwells the one new humanity, making the church the living temple of the living God.

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## Reformed Theological Significance

### **Reformed Theological Significance:**

Ephesians 2 is one of the load-bearing passages of Reformed soteriology, providing exegetical ground for the doctrines of total depravity (vv. 1–3), unconditional election (vv. 4–5, where God acts while the objects are dead and unable to contribute), and the absolute gratuity of justification by grace through faith alone (vv. 8–9). The passage's insistence that boasting is entirely excluded is not incidental — it is the functional test for any account of salvation: if it permits boasting at any point in any form, it has departed from Paul's architecture. Equally significant is the Reformed understanding of the church displayed in vv. 19–22: the church is not a voluntary association of individually saved persons but a corporate new humanity built on apostolic-prophetic foundation, with Christ as cornerstone, growing together as the temple of God's own habitation. This corporate pneumatology resists both individualism (the Spirit indwells *the body*, not merely aggregated individuals) and every form of ecclesial pluralism that treats church unity as optional. Ephesians 2 is not merely a passage about salvation — it is a passage about what

salvation produces: a community whose very existence is a proclamation that the gospel is true.

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## Main Takeaway

You were dead — not struggling, not seeking, not almost there — dead. And God, because of the greatness of His love and the richness of His mercy, made you alive. He raised you. He seated you. And He did it entirely by grace, so that the only possible response is astonishment and worship, and the only possible posture is a life emptied of every form of boasting. The wall between you and God has been demolished. The wall between you and the person you considered furthest from you has been demolished. That is what the cross accomplished. The only question left is whether you will live inside that accomplished reality or outside it — but either way, the wall is down.

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## Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

### Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls:

- **Preaching vv. 8–9 without v. 10 — producing antinomianism by omission.** The doctrinal triplet is not complete without v. 10. “Not by works” (v. 9) is the negative; “created in Christ Jesus *for* good works” (v. 10) is the positive. A sermon that labors over the exclusion of works as the basis of salvation and then does not close the circuit with works as the *fruit* of salvation produces hearers who are theologically correct about justification and practically unmoored about sanctification. Paul gives both with one breath — the preacher must follow him.
- **Reducing “dead in trespasses and sins” to a metaphor for moral weakness.** The homiletical temptation is to make the diagnosis relatable by softening it — “you were spiritually lost,” “you were disconnected from God.” This loses everything. Paul says *dead*, and the whole architecture of vv. 4–7 depends on the severity of that word. If the hearers were merely wounded, God’s intervention is assistance; if they were dead, God’s intervention is resurrection. Only resurrection forecloses boasting absolutely. Only resurrection produces the doxology Paul is after. Preach the full weight of the diagnosis — it is what makes the “but God” land with its proper force.
- **Treating vv. 11–22 as an appendix about ethnic reconciliation rather than as the same gospel doing its second work.** The structure of Ephesians 2 is intentional — the death-to-life movement of vv. 1–10 is directly parallel to the far-off-to-near movement of vv. 11–22, and Paul uses the same “but now” hinge in both (cf. vv. 4, 13). The second half is not an application of the first half; it is the *same claim* extended into ecclesiology. Preachers who preach vv. 1–10 as the “gospel part” and

then treat vv. 11–22 as a separate social or political application have severed what Paul has joined. The reconciliation of Jew and Gentile is not an ethical implication of the gospel; it is part of what the gospel *does* in the same act.

- **Abstracting “Christ is our peace” (v. 14) away from the cross.** The peace of v. 14 is grounded specifically in “His flesh” (v. 15) and “the cross” (v. 16) — it is not a general disposition of goodwill or a spiritual atmosphere Jesus creates. The wall was broken down in a body, on a cross, in history. Preaching that treats the peace of Ephesians 2 as a relational posture Christ models, rather than an atonement He accomplished, produces moralism (be at peace with each other like Jesus was) rather than gospel (Christ absorbed the hostility in His own body so that the wall no longer exists). The preacher must keep the cross at the center of the horizontal reconciliation, not merely of the vertical.
- **Failing to land the cosmic-display purpose of verse 7.** Most preaching of Ephesians 2 focuses on what salvation does *for* the believer — rightly so. But v. 7 states a purpose that exceeds the individual: God is saving sinners in order to display, “in the coming ages,” the immeasurable riches of His grace to the watching cosmos. The church is not primarily the beneficiary of grace — it is the exhibit of grace, the demonstration that what God promises He actually does. Preaching that never surfaces this cosmic-display purpose leaves the congregation with an undersized account of their own existence. They are not merely saved people — they are, together, the eternal evidence of what grace can do with the dead.
- **Preaching the temple image (vv. 19–22) individualistically.** The dominant Protestant piety around “temple” language defaults to 1 Corinthians 6:19 — “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” — an individual image. Ephesians 2:21–22 is corporate: “the whole structure... you also are being built *together*.” The dwelling place of God is the assembled community, not the aggregated private devotional lives of individual members. This is not a denial of personal indwelling — it is an assertion that there is a corporate dimension of God’s habitation that cannot be experienced in isolation. Preachers should resist the default individualism and insist on what Paul is actually saying: the church *together* is the temple, which means that forsaking the assembly is not merely a personal loss — it is an architectural absence.