

Before & After – Ephesians 2:1-22

We've all seen them many times. Those "before and after" photos that portray the dramatic difference that some diet, makeover, or remodeling project wrought. Even many popular television shows like "The Biggest Loser," "What Not to Wear," and "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" find their success in the "before and after" theme.

The "before" lacks something vital, suffers from some affliction, or fails to fulfill its purpose. The "after" has received what it lacked, been healed and made whole, and can meet its fullest potential. We love this transformation, the process of becoming an "after."

Chapter two of Ephesians reads like "Extreme Makeover: Spiritual Edition." Paul paints a graphic picture of what we looked like before God saved us. Then Paul reveals the beautiful "after" portrait. He also clearly shows us what Christ did to cause the transformation.

Read Ephesians 2:1-22 to get the "big picture" effect.

Now, let's dig in. You're going to need something to write on, so grab a tablet, piece of paper, or your journal. If you printed a hard copy of this lesson, you can even turn it over and use the back. Now draw a line right down the middle from top to bottom. Label the left column "before" and the right column "after."

Before

Look back through 2:1-22. As you do, in the left column of your paper list all words, phrases, and facts that describe our condition "before" God saved us.

My list was long – and ugly. How about yours? Before God saved us our condition was dire and "hopeless." Let's condense all of Paul's disturbing descriptions to two basic truths:

1. We were dead in our sins.
2. We were separated from God.

Read Romans 5:12-14 and Romans 6:23. Explain why we were "dead" before God saved us.

We were separated from God, who is Spirit, because our spirits were dead from the effects of sin. We were “objects of wrath” – deserving of God’s punishment. We were unbelieving and under God’s condemnation (see John 3:17-18). But praise God, He did not leave us that way!

After

Look through chapter two again. This time look for the words and phrases that describe our condition “after” God saved us. Write these words and phrases in the right column of your paper. When possible right them across from the corresponding condition in the left column. For instance, “before” salvation we were “dead in our transgression” but after salvation we are “alive in Christ.”

Here is a picture of our spiritual “before and after.” Before, God intervened we were dead and eternally separated from God, but after His saving work of grace, we are alive in Christ and reconciled to God. Very similar descriptions are found in several other biblical passages. Let’s take a look.

Read Titus 3:3-7. What additional “before and after” descriptions do you find in this passage?

According to verse 5, what causes our spiritual rebirth?

Jesus talked about this spiritual rebirth in a conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus.

Read John 3:1-8. What did Jesus say must happen for someone to be saved (“enter into the Kingdom of God”)?

Sin-dead spirits made alive again by the powerful activity and presence of the Holy Spirit! But does God simply pour out His Spirit on sinners because He loves us? Scripture is clear that God loves us and desires to have a relationship with us. But no matter how great His love, our holy God cannot ignore our sin. In his classic devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers elaborates.

The great miracle of the grace of God is that He forgives sin, and it is the death of Jesus Christ alone that enables the divine nature to forgive and to remain true to itself in doing so. It is

shallow nonsense to say that God forgives us because He is love. Once we have been convicted of sin, we will never say this again. The love of God means Calvary – nothing less! The love of God is spelled out on the Cross and nowhere else. The only basis on which God can forgive me is the Cross of Christ. It is there that His conscience is satisfied. – Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, November 19

God's love desired mercy. But God's justice required that the price for sin be paid. God demanded the death penalty for our sin and then provided it Himself through the death of Christ. Ultimate mercy. Transforming grace.

Transforming Grace

Although God's work of grace on our behalf is sprinkled throughout the entire chapter, the heart of God's transforming work is found in verses 4-10. The first three verses of chapter 2 paint a dismal scene of our "before" condition. But then we get to the "but!" ***But because of His great love for us...***

Reread Ephesians 2:4-10. Write every phrase that includes a "with Christ," "in Christ," or "with Him" or "in Him."

Now reread Ephesians 1:19-20. What parallels do you see?

Christ's death and resurrection satisfy the justice of God. Our salvation is possible because of this work of Jesus on our behalf. According to what we see here in Ephesians, Christians - those who have trusted in Christ's work for salvation - also identify with His resurrection and glorification! Our new life is truly "in Christ." We have been joined with Him. God's work *through* Christ is His work *in* us.

God works through Christ for our benefit. We cannot buy or earn our salvation. God graciously gives it through the vehicle of faith. And even our faith is a gift of God through the Holy Spirit (2:8-9). We have no reason to boast only great cause to glorify our Savior.

Eternal grace. Paul tells us why God undertook this great spiritual "before and after." God made us alive in Christ, raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms so He could continue to display His incomparable grace and kindness throughout all eternity (2:7). We

are His glorious masterpiece (2:10), proof of God's great goodness and unceasing mercy. May He be praised!

Repurposed

Recently, I met with a staff member of a local church. After our meeting she gave me a tour of their lovely facility. The older section of the building had just been remodeled and updated. My guide used the term "repurposed" to highlight the fact that the rooms were being used differently than they had been before. For instance, the former sanctuary is now a gathering room for groups and old children's classrooms are now offices for preschool staff.

Reread Eph 2:10. How have you been spiritually "repurposed?" Describe the difference between "your" purpose for your life before salvation and God's purpose for your life after salvation.

God has a purpose for your life. He poured out His grace and gave your new life. He raised you up in Christ and even now you "sit with Him in the heavenly realms."

I'd love to hear your thoughts about your "before and after." What's the biggest difference God has made in your life personally?

Weekly Challenge

(Each week, in addition to the weekly lesson, I will provide an opportunity – for those who have the time and desire – to go a little deeper. If you are unable to do this, please don't worry, but if you can, take the plunge!)

Do you know Ephesians 2:8-9 by heart? If not, I challenge you to memorize these two verses this week. These verses, which encapsulate the Gospel message, will help you share the Good News with those around you!