

## Grace Works Both Ways (Part 1)

Ephesians 2:11-22

July 10, 2005

Don't you just love a good "*before and after*" story—a story like that of sixteen year old **ANGEL SANTOS** of Belize, Central America, who grew up enduring taunts, stares, and even death threats due to his unusual facial deformity.



Being born with a wide mid-forehead cleft left Angel with an appearance that ironically resulted in frequent accusations of being “the devil”. He and his mother were forced to move from place to place trying to find a school where Angel could study without constantly being afraid. It wasn't until a businessman from Seattle named Rob Hamlin met Angel on board a diving boat that Angel's life began to change.

After meeting Angel and personally learning of his plight, Rob was determined to find someone who could help this boy with such a hideous appearance. He spent an entire year calling hospitals and doctors before he finally found a group of medical professionals who volunteer their time and surgical skills through an international care organization called LEAP. The LEAP Foundation made arrangements with Children's Medical Center of Dallas to accept Angel for treatment and assembled a team of 12 medical professionals who donated time and medical services to help him.



Angel is now back in school, studying computers and enjoying the gift of simply being “normal”. Angel says: “*You can't imagine how good it feels to walk down the street and not feel people staring at you....*”

Angel's story is just one of many such stories.

There also is the story of Hamlet de la Cruz, age 12, who was born with a severely underdeveloped lower jaw and thus could eat only foods his mother liquefied for him. Jaw reconstruction surgery has not only radically changed his appearance, but has given him the ability to enjoy a normal diet.



And there is the story of Esther Rodriguez. Esther was born with a mouth that had a gaping hole in the center and a mouth roof that was completely open to her nasal passages. Today she now has a closed palate and a beautiful smile. And there are many more stories like these. They are examples of God's common grace moving people to help people. And their lives will never be quite the same for it. We look at stories like this and *rejoice*—and *well* we should.



But do you know something? If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, *you* have a *before/after* story too! In fact, your story is far more dramatic than the most *extreme* medical story. That is what Paul has been describing for us in the first ten verses of Ephesians 2. You and I are a part of God's *Extreme Makeover*. A makeover that takes people like us who were dead because of trespasses and sins, who were totally deformed and dominated by the devil, the world's system and our own fallen desires, who were by our very nature legitimate and even necessary objects of God's wrath—and has taken us and re-created us into human beings who look more and more like the perfect prototype of humanity—the Lord Jesus Christ!!

But do you know what is *really* sad? It is the number of professing Christians who live as though they have no idea that such a **Makeover** is even going on—or is even *supposed* to be going on! It would be like one of these children we have just seen who has experienced a significant medical transformation—going on and living as though it never even occurred.

And so Paul writes to the churches at and surrounding Ephesus—and to churches throughout the ages and reminds us about the glorious grace of God’s **Extreme Makeover**. That “makeover” not only *vertically* changes our relationship with *Him*—it *horizontally* makes over our relationship with **each other**. And he puts these next twelve verses in a similar **before/after** format to help us appreciate the radical nature of what God is doing. Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 2:11-22:

*11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit [Pray].*

Few texts are quoted more than the opening verses of Ephesians 2:1-10—especially verses 8-9:

*8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.*

So why should we stop there when the text goes on to describe the equally significant *horizontal* effects of God’s grace? Paul is saying here that the same grace that heals our vertical relationship with God and restores us to what it means to be fully human is the same grace that takes mangled, dysfunctional human relationships and puts them back together and makes them work like never before. Grace doesn’t just affect our relationship with God—but our relationships with **each other**. Grace works—**BOTH WAYS!**

**Transition:** To fully appreciate that, Paul reminds us of what sin has done to relationships. So in verses 11-12 he tells us to...

I. Remember what you were *before* Christ: ***Alienated from each other*** (vs. 11-12).

Everybody has a “BC” and an “AD.” “BC” is the time you had *before Christ*—that is before you trusted Christ as Savior and Lord. “AD” means the year of our Lord—but spiritually it marks the new life you have had in Christ since you believed the Gospel. Paul is saying that you need to recall your “BC” days. Recall what life was like before you came to faith in Christ. Have you done that lately? Do you *ever* do that? Some would tell you that you aren’t supposed to do that—that indeed you are to “forget those things which are behind.” But when Paul says that in Philippians 3, he is not talking about past failures or the emptiness of the “old life”, he is talking about our supposed *past successes* which keep us from moving ahead with Christ (If you read Philippians 3, starting with verse one and go to the end of that chapter, you will see that to be the case). Both Old and New Testament passages call us to ***remember*** or ***not forget*** what we used to be.

- In Deuteronomy 9:7, Moses told the Israelites who were about to enter the Promise Land: “***Remember this and never forget*** how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the LORD.”
- In II Peter 1:9, a sure indication of spiritual decline is when a professing believer “...has ***forgotten that he has been cleansed*** from his past sins.”
- Even in his later spiritual years, Paul never ***forgot*** God’s grace to him in bringing him to faith. Listen to him in his own words in I Timothy 1:12-13:

*12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. 13 Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy....”*

In fact—consider this for a moment: *Every time you participate in the Lord’s Supper as we will do in a few minutes—you are remembering your BC days and the glory of God’s mercy to you in Christ!* And that is so important because it is a huge part of what fuels the Christian lifestyle that God calls us to in the last three chapters of this book.

Keep in mind that as Paul helps his audience to remember the bad old days “before Christ”, he is repeating some of what he already said in verses 1-3, but he is now emphasizing the *horizontal* implications. He does this by addressing the Gentile believers in his audience and reminding them of what it was like to be an “***outsider***” in terms of God’s redemptive program. Initially Adam and Eve had a beautiful relationship with God and each other—that is until sin cut them off from God. Then things went “south” real quick. Amazingly, God promised that He would restore that breach—but He did not do so immediately. He began by first choosing a people for Himself, a people that He would not only redeem but through whom “all the nations of the earth would be blessed.” And so God called

Abraham and from his seed chose Israel to be a light unto the nations. Everything he did for Israel—the establishment of a covenant, the erection of the Tabernacle and later the Temple along with all his laws and sacrifices—all of this was to be a testimony before a watching world of God’s transcendent holiness as well as His gracious intention for people made in His image to once again dwell with Him.

But sadly, Israel forgot her calling and twisted her special role into an arrogant bigotry that caused them to despise the Gentiles—even going so far as to refer to them as “*dogs*.” The Jews were so contemptuous of the Gentiles that they went so far as to claim that God created Gentiles merely to be fuel for the fires of hell. William Barclay, a well known student of NT times mentions that “*It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world.*” So absolute was this socio-religious barrier between Jews and Gentiles that if a Jewish boy were to ever marry a Gentile girl—rather than celebrate his wedding, they would immediately conduct his funeral—for that kind of contact with an unclean Gentile (or “Haggoyim”) was the equivalent of death!

Knowing some of this background enables us to better understand Paul’s description of life “Before Christ” with his Gentile audience. Let’s eaves drop again on Paul’s conversation with the Ephesians in 2:12:

*Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men).*

Do you hear a little *name-calling* going on here? “Called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision.’” They might as well as said: “scum” or “slime-bag”—or something worse. But notice how Paul characterizes it: “By those who call themselves ‘the circumcision.’” Circumcision, of course, was a procedure performed on all Jewish male babies on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. From our modern perspective, it seems a bit odd—but in actuality it was a simple if not graphic reminder that something was desperately wrong with man’s heart that needed to be removed. It was a picture of mankind’s need of the removal of sin. But the Jews missed the point and reduced it to an entrance fee for joining the commonwealth of Israel. Never mind that many of them never understood its ultimate meaning that every person needs a Savior. And so Paul makes a point here that the NIV translators have beautifully captured with the use of quotation marks. “Those who call themselves ‘the circumcision.’” In essence he is saying that the “names” don’t even matter if you don’t grasp the meaning behind the “name.” Paul then moves on from the name-calling to the reality that for years, the Gentiles indeed were seemingly locked out of God’s redemptive program. He uses 5 terms in verse 13 to describe their predicament:

- **Separate from Christ:** Even though all men, including Israelites, were sinners, the Gentiles were largely shut out of God’s redemptive purposes. At least Jews had the OT Scriptures and at least had an inkling of a coming Messiah. The Gentiles by and large looked to the false hopes of their false gods like Baal or Ishtar or Molech or Zeus.
- **Excluded from citizenship in Israel:** As a theocracy, Israel was unique among all the nations inasmuch as *God* was their King. God actually made a covenant with Israel that he would be their Great King and they would be His people. But the Gentiles had no such arrangement. They were excluded from the Kingdom. They were at best “aliens” or....
- **Foreigners to the covenants of the promise!** They also were...
- **Without hope.** They were without hope inasmuch as even though God had planned and promised to include them one day. But they *didn’t know* it! Furthermore, they were...
- **Without God in the world.** It is not as though they had no knowledge of God. Romans 1 is very clear that they did and do—and therefore are without excuse. But what does Romans 1 say they did with that knowledge? They suppressed it and turned instead to idolizing the Creation!

*What a grim picture!* William Hendricksen, in his Commentary on Ephesians (p. 129) captures Paul’s description very powerfully: **Christless; Stateless; Friendless; Hopeless; Godless!**

Now try to stay with me here. I know what some of you are thinking: “Nice history lesson. But this stuff has nothing to do with me. This is about people who lived long ago and far away!” Wait a minute. Paul is simply giving what at that time was a contemporary illustration of what it means to be alienated from God and the professing people of God. If you will take the time to think it through, you can take this text and push its implications to fit us today. Take those last two descriptions especially—*hopeless and Godless*. Does that fit our world? Does that bring back any memories?

Remember what life was like when you lived for the weekends. When the thought that finally got you out of bed in the morning was you were going to *get wasted* that night?! And those hangovers—what a bonus prize they were. Great memories—right? Do you remember the rush of thinking about a one night stand—the reality that unfortunately never quite lived up to the intensity of the rush? And of course—there were the weekends of gambling. The crazy holiday office parties. And those Christians. Those people who were always there to take the joy out of your pursuit of pleasure. You hated hearing your Christian neighbor’s car door shut as they left for church while you recuperated from all your fun. And when hurricanes hit and terrorists threatened to strike, they seemed to have a calmness and a hope that seemed so far away—so unreal.

For those of you who did not grow up in such an overtly pagan environment, the faith of your family that graced your home may have prevented you from going as

far down the road of despair—but you still knew what it was to experience the emptiness that comes from desires that *rule* your heart but can never satisfy your *deepest* thirst (See Ephesians 4:18-19; 22).

Paul says—Remember that! Remember life “**BC**” so you can appreciate life “**AD!**” Remember the alienation that you had toward God and toward others. Remember and do not forget. Because the moment you start to forget, grace begins to *shrink* in your eyes—and gradually and eventually it will no longer seem to be amazing.

**Transition:** When you try to remember what you were before Christ, you are ready to...

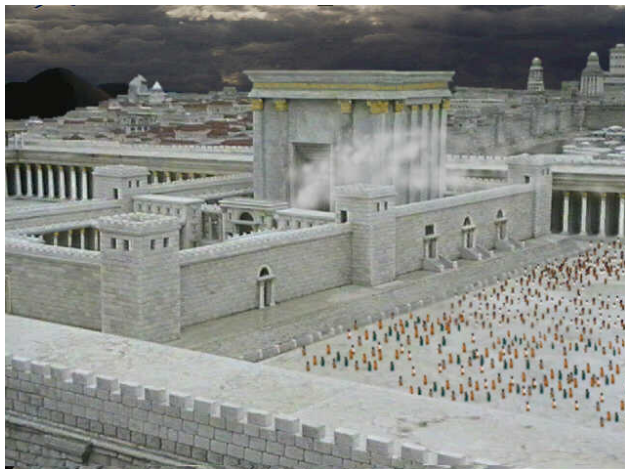
II. Recall what Christ has done for us: ***He has made peace*** (vs. 13-18).

*13 “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”*

The Jews were physically near God inasmuch as God dwelt in their midst. Gentiles were not even allowed within the Israeli camp. But when Christ came and died on the cross, He made it possible for *all* who believe on Him to *come near*—that is to have *fellowship* with God and God’s people. He goes on to explain in verses 14-16:

*14 “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility<sup>15</sup> by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*

This passage makes no sense unless you know what Paul is alluding to when he talks about this “*barrier*” or “*dividing wall of hostility*.” This picture provides a



view of the temple itself in the midst of the plaza, or temple mount. The tallest structure is the "The Holy Place," in which only the priests were allowed to enter. In the back of the "Holy Place" was the "Most Holy Place," in which only the High Priest was allowed to enter once a year. In front of the Holy Place was the altar, where animal sacrifices were killed and burned (notice the smoke). In front of the altar and Holy Place was a square courtyard for the Jewish women called the Court of the Women. Women were not allowed to enter the altar area. But as you look at the right of the picture, you see a large court. That was called the Court of the Gentiles. Gentiles, were not allowed pass through the temple walls *at all*. Violation of the prohibition meant death!

The ancient Jewish historian, Josephus, actually talks about a posted sign that warned Gentiles not to go beyond the Court of the Gentiles into the Temple area.. But it wasn't until 1871 that this sign was actually discovered. It states:

***“No foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”***

I am sure that Paul was well aware of that sign. As far as we know, it remained intact until the Temple was destroyed by Titus in AD 70. But Paul takes this sign and uses it as an illustration of what Christ accomplished in His cross work many years before the sign ever came down. Matthew reports in His Gospel (27:51) that the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was split from top to bottom—thus signifying that the shed blood of Christ had made a way for His people to be reconciled to God. So Paul is saying that likewise Christ's death through the shedding of His blood was not only to reconcile sinners to God—but to each other! To take people, formerly created as one people—divided by sin and rebellion and re-making them into One new entity—something He calls here and reiterates later—the body of Christ!

Brothers and sisters—do you see what grace does? It takes that which sin divides—and puts it back together on God's terms! The peace that ensues is not the mere absence of hostility-or even noise for that matter. That's not peace, that's a cemetery! Peace is taking something that was formerly united, then broken—and re-uniting it in a bond that eventually becomes stronger than ever before. That is what the Gospel is all about. It takes the most unlikely scenarios and turns them into trailers for the final act of redemption. Paul shows us how God did it in the early church between Jews and Gentiles. And His Spirit is still doing it *today!*

He does it when believers who have been at war with each other put down their weapons and repent of desires that have broken the peace and reconcile with each other. That is what Paul is driving at in I Cor. 6.

He does it when husbands and wives finally get beyond their own personal dreams to Christ's dream—and suddenly marriage becomes an opportunity to set Christ's glory on display.

I have even seen Him do it unlikely places like Montgomery, AL where my wife and I attended an evangelical church and watched an incredible display of love and devotion between black and white church members in a city known for marches, mayhem, and racially-motivated murders!

Grace works *both* ways! Don't settle for a grace that takes care of your eternity but is concerned for little else. That's cheap grace. If we truly know anything of God's vertical grace—we ought to commit ourselves to and long for a more and more obvious display of His horizontal grace. A grace that gets beyond the times we meet here behind the four walls of this building and manifests itself in day to day relationships of encouragement and ministry to and with each other in the community. We got a little taste of what that can look like with the MCREST program.

This kind of grace starts with each of us. It begins by emulating Paul's prayer that God will open our eyes and we will know the hope of His calling, the riches of His inheritance in us, and His incomparably great power toward us. We ought to plead with God for more and more and more. "God, we have had a taste of your *before/after* kind of grace. But we want more. We want to see you work, Lord. We want more stories for which to praise you. More stories to attract the attention of a watching community. More lives radically affected by a grace whose power and presence cannot be denied. Many more "extreme makeovers" for which to rejoice and to praise God. Make that your prayer and your passion.