

EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS

Message #9

Ephesians 2:11-22

I received a call on Monday night from a man from a different state that I knew years ago who was troubled by a course being taught in the church. He said there is a new movement that is sweeping through different churches that is promoting the idea that one major commitment to Jesus Christ can revolutionize your life and take you to a new, almost sinless level of spirituality. He asked me what I thought. I said there is not one commitment that anyone can ever make that will ever change the fact that you live in your flesh and that you have a sin nature that at times gets the best of you. Paul struggled with his flesh thirty years after he believed on Jesus Christ. Just before he died, Paul said he knew that God would deliver him from every evil work. So there is no one-time decision you can make that will give you total, perfect victory for the rest of your life.

It seems to me from studying this book of Ephesians that God never wants His people strutting around like proud peacocks. He wants His people humble, honest and honorable and totally dependent on Him. He wants His people worshipping and praising Him for His grace and not for our greatness.

This section is interesting because in the previous verses, Paul has driven home amazing truth about the grace package that we have received in Jesus Christ. God elected us; Jesus redeemed us and the Holy Spirit sealed us. We were dead and He made us alive. He totally and completely saved us by His grace. It was not of works, not of merit, but it was all of His grace.

Now one key to praising God for this amazing grace package is to admit and remember just how far away from God we actually were, and just how close to God we actually now are by the work of Jesus Christ.

In view of the fact that God has saved us by His grace and in view of the fact that we are to be a display that we are the workmanship of God, God wants us to remember that there was a time when we had absolutely no relationship with Him whatsoever.

GOD WANTS US TO REMEMBER THAT THERE WAS A TIME WHEN WE HAD NO RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, BUT THROUGH THE CROSSWORK AND SHED BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST WE ARE NOW RECONCILED TO AN AMAZING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

What do we need to remember as believers? There are three major memories we are to have:

MEMORY #1 – We need to remember what we originally were. **2:11**

We were Gentiles who were originally, totally and completely alienated from God. Now most of us have been raised in homes and churches that didn't stress this, but there is no question when you read the O.T. that the key nation that had a relationship with God was Israel and not Gentiles.

There was a sharp division and contention between Jews and Gentiles worse than that of Republicans and Democrats. To the Jews, the Gentiles were dogs. They did not have the Law, they did not keep the Law and they weren't even circumcised.

Non-Jews were classified as not having a covenant relationship with God by the Jews. Circumcision was the sign made in the flesh of the covenant that God made with Israel. So basically the Jews were saying that Gentiles had no covenant relationship with God whatsoever because they had not been circumcised. So the religious Jews viewed Gentiles as nothing. What is interesting is that today it is the Gentile world that views Israel as nothing, but there was a time when Israel viewed the Gentile world as nothing.

Physical circumcision means nothing today for either Jew or Gentile, because what is needed is a circumcision of the heart made without hands- Colossians 2:11,14. What is needed is a circumcision of heart which is wrought by the Holy Spirit, when one believes on Jesus Christ.

Every single Gentile was in this condition prior to Jesus Christ. This brings up a very important theological point; **without faith in Jesus Christ one is alienated from God.**

John Newton was a slave trader and godless man who was converted in 1748. From 1755-1760, he studied Greek and Hebrew and by the year 1764 he was a leader in the church. He is probably best known for writing the hymn "Amazing Grace." But he was a pastor of one church in England for twenty-eight years, from 1779 until he died in 1807. In his office, on his desk he had part of one Bible verse- Deuteronomy 15:15 which says: "You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you..."

That is what we were until God saved us. We did not have any relationship with God.

MEMORY #2 – We need to remember how alienated from God we were before grace. **2:12**

There are five descriptions of how alienated from God we were:

Description #1 - We were separated from Christ. **2:12a**

The proper noun "Christ" means Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. Prior to grace we had no relationship with Jesus Christ and no chance of sharing in the blessings of God. Gentiles had no national hope of a Messiah. We were Christ less and spiritually speaking, homeless and also hopeless. We had no chance of ever having a relationship with or having the blessings of God.

Description #2 - We were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. **2:12b**

Israel was the nation connected to God. She was a theocracy in which God watched over her and ruled her. Prior to the grace of God we had no connection like that to God.

We were alienated from the privileged nation Israel, who had all of the promises of God.

Description #3 - We were strangers to the covenants of promise. **2:12c**

The Gentiles of Ephesus were non-Jewish, uncircumcised and not connected in any way to a covenantal relationship with God. We were foreigners with no rights connected to God. After the flood, God separated a nation for Himself called Israel and He made covenant promises to that nation. Notice the noun “covenants” is plural. This refutes the idea of Covenant Theology that says there is only one covenant of Grace. Israel has multiple covenants: Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic and New. We were left out of all of them. As Dr. Ironside said, God made many wonderful promises about the Gentiles, but He never made promises to the Gentiles. The Scriptures were for Israel not for Gentiles. The promises were all hers and prior to grace, we were left out.

Description #4 - We had no hope . **2:12d**

Israel had a definite hope of a promised land, a righteous king and a glorious kingdom. But we had none.

Don't miss this point- apart from Jesus Christ and the grace of God we have no hope for ever having any relationship with God, and there is no hope of our status with God ever changing. You will not find any hope in yourself. If you look at yourself what you will likely find is failure. It is Jesus Christ who is our hope and it is Jesus Christ who gives us hope.

Apart from Jesus Christ a person's heart is restless. Something is nagging and something is missing. Jesus Christ fulfills life and gives hope.

Description #5 - We were without God. **2:12e**

Now I want us to observe the words “without God” in the world. The Greek word used here is “atheos” (αθεος) which is the word from which we get our English word “atheist.” Biblically speaking, an atheist is one who does not believe in Jesus Christ as the only Savior who can reconcile sinners.

MEMORY #3 – We need to remember the results of what Jesus Christ has done. **2:13-18**

Notice how **verse 13** begins “but now in Christ Jesus.” We are no longer “without God,” we are “in Christ Jesus.” We are now in a very close relationship to God through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Now the “for” which begins **verse 14** explains what being brought near to God by the shed blood of Jesus Christ actually means. There are six amazing grace results of the work of Jesus Christ.

Result #1 - Jesus Christ brings us near to God. **2:13**

Jesus Christ brings us into a close relationship with God. Notice we are brought near to God by the blood of Jesus Christ. We are not brought near to God by anything we do. In fact, the text says we were “far off” from any relationship with God.

Result #2 - Jesus Christ is the means by which we are in a peaceful relationship with God. **2:14a**

Notice what is said here; **Jesus Christ is our peace**. Peace in a relationship with God is found in no one else. Jesus Christ gives us peace with God and He also gives us the peace of God. We cannot make peace with God. In fact, in our flesh we are at war with God. In us lies no good thing. Jesus Christ gives us peace with God and the peace of God.

Result #3 - Jesus Christ forms a new unity in the church between Jews and Gentiles. **2:14b**

Jesus Christ makes Gentiles so at peace with God that they now have the same intimate relationship with God that Israel had.

In the Temple of Jerusalem, there was an outer court area known as the court of the Gentiles. It was separated from the rest of the temple and there was about a five foot high barrier which kept Gentiles from entering areas which only permitted Jews. Paul says all of those barriers are gone. There is no longer any ethnic segregation, but Jesus Christ has now made it possible for any sinner to have a close relationship with God.

Chrysostom said it is not that the Gentiles have now been given the nobility of the Jews; it is that both Jews and Gentiles have been given a new nobility in their relationship with God.

Result #4 - Jesus Christ abolishes the Law. **2:15**

Jesus Christ abolished the Law so we could have a peaceful relationship with God. He fulfilled and satisfied all of its demands and then he went to the cross so we could have a relationship with God.

Verse 15 actually describes what Christ had to do to give us peace with God. He had to use His own flesh to go to the cross to take our sin and the full brunt of the O.T. Law. The barrier between sinful man and God was the O.T. Law and the barrier between Gentiles and Jews was the O.T. Law. **Neither the O.T. Jews nor we entered into a relationship with God by any merit.** The Law was given to Israel, not to Gentiles. This is critical theology here. The O.T. Mosaic Law has been abolished by Jesus Christ so that now Gentiles may have an intimate relationship with God and so may Jews. Anyone may have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ because the O.T. Law has been abolished. Believers are no longer under the O.T. Law (Rom. 10:4). The O.T. Law is no longer our teacher or schoolmaster (Gal. 3:25). In Christ we are dead to the Law (Rom. 7:1-6). We do not live by legal codes, we live by grace.

Do not overlook the fact that now Jesus Christ forms “one new man,” not “men.” The singular noun “man” refers to a brand new race, the Church. All who believe in Jesus Christ are part of the formation of the Church which was wrought by the grace of God. Now any person of any ethnic background may have a relationship with God.

Result #5 - Jesus Christ's cross work reconciles every believer to a peace relationship with God. **2:16-17**

The idea behind the concept of reconciliation is that you have two parties who are at enmity with each other or in some hostile relationship with each other and you move the relationship to a status of amity, peace and friendship. Two things are immediately apparent:

- 1) We need to be reconciled to God because we aren't in a peace relationship with God;
- 2) Only Jesus Christ can reconcile us to God and put us into a peaceful relationship with God.

Notice how this reconciliation occurs "through the cross." In other words, the cross work of Jesus Christ is the only thing that can reconcile a sinner alienated from God into having a relationship with God.

Now notice what **verse 16** says, "both" need to be reconciled to God. Every Gentile and every Jew needs to be reconciled to God and the only way to be reconciled is by faith believe in Jesus Christ and the sacrificial work that He accomplished on the cross.

Any who have been reconciled to God are in "one body," which is the Church. So we now have a new reconciled relationship with God in the Church. We have been reconciled to God in the Church Age, the Age of Grace.

In **verse 17** it says that Jesus Christ came and preached peace. This is a quote from Isaiah 57:19 which is a prophetic prediction that one day God would proclaim a peace message to sinners. Jesus Christ is God and He proclaims it. In other words, Jesus Christ came and proclaimed that He was the One who could bring sinful Jews and Gentiles into a peaceful relationship with God. How did He preach peace? Well He preached it Himself after His resurrection- John 20:19,26, and so did His apostles and disciples. They all proclaimed that Jesus Christ is the only means by which a sinner may have a peace relationship with God.

Result #6 - Jesus Christ gives us access to God the Father. **2:18**

Take a good look at **verse 18** because all three members of the Trinity are there. God the Son ("through Him"), God the Spirit and God the Father. Every believer has access to God and the entire Trinity is involved in this amazing grace accessibility.

What exactly does having access to God mean? Dr. S. Lewis Johnson gives one of the great answers to this question when he says what it means is "that we have the remarkable, glorious privilege of carrying on a relationship with our Father by virtue of what Christ has done through the Holy Spirit, in all of the days and months and years that transpire between the time of our salvation and the time of our catching up to be with the Lord Jesus" (*Ephesians 2:11-22*, p. 6). The tragedy for many believers is that they do not realize the reality of this accessibility.

The accessibility that we need is with God the Father. It is God the Son's work who makes that possible and it is God the Spirit's work that makes it applicable. So our package of sovereign grace is a package in which the entire Trinity works in harmony to secure for us.

This verse shows the lunacy of Arminianism. In Arminianism, God the Father does choose some but God the Son tries to convince people to come to Him, but sometimes God the Spirit fails because certain people use their will to overtake this sovereign plan of God.

When you read this verse it says just the opposite. God chooses, the Son sacrifices and the Spirit secures and every believer has access to God.

Now in **verses 19-22** Paul uses a series of metaphors to describe the reality of our exalted grace status:

Metaphor #1 - We are now heavenly citizens . **2:19a**

We are no longer strangers and aliens in our relationship with God; we are saintly citizens of heaven. Look at this. Because of our relationship with Jesus Christ we are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God's household. Many great saints are now in glory living in the actual household of God in heaven and we are right there with them. We are part of a heavenly franchise.

Metaphor #2 - We are God's household . **2:19b**

We are part of God's Divine family. The church should be a place where people can come and hear and learn and grow. We are a family. The church should not be a strict order filled with all kinds of rules that make a family squirm.

Metaphor #3 - We are a developing building . **2:20**

Now I want us to notice how a church that will stand is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, which is the Scriptures. The church that will always end up stable and standing is one that is built upon careful teaching of God's Word. That is why Paul challenged Timothy in his final charge "preach the word." That is what builds the church strong.

The household of God is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets and Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone. Now understand this. Careful understanding of the Scriptures starts with a relationship with Jesus Christ and the process of actually becoming a household of God comes through understanding the apostolic and prophetic Scriptures.

This is exactly why we must preach and point people to Jesus Christ. Not the O.T. Law, not their works, not their religion. Jesus Christ is the key to a relationship with God.

Metaphor #4 - We are a growing holy temple . **2:21a**

Now don't overlook the fact that the text says we are being fitted together and we are growing. What that language means is that we are not complete yet, but we are getting there. The church is not some static structure. We are people who believe in Jesus Christ and then we come and we learn and we grow and we are fitted together.

Metaphor #5 - We are the dwelling place of God. **2:21b-22**

God dwells in every single believer- Jew and Gentile.

What God wants and what Paul wanted is that believers realize the amazing grace that is found in Jesus Christ.