

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians
Knowing Your Privilege in Christ
"The Progress of the Church"
(Ephesians 2:11-22)

11 Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; **12** That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: **13** But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. **14** For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; **15** Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; **16** And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: **17** And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. **18** For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. **19** Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; **20** And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; **21** In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: **22** In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

OUTLINE

- (1) Bringing the Lost to God (v11-18)
- (2) Building up the Saved in God (v19-22)

INTRODUCTION

The title of our message is the "The Progress of the Church" taken from Ephesians 2:11-22. How can the church make progress? It is by bringing the lost to God (v11-18) and building up the saved in God (v19-22).

(1) Bringing the Lost to God (v11-18)

Our text begins with conjunction "wherefore". Because of what Paul has said earlier, this is the follow on thought. What did Paul said from verses 1-10?

He tells us the character of the church. The church is not dead as the world is but alive in Christ. And verse 10 tells us that we are created for good works. Christians are created by God to have spiritual life so that we can be a witness for Him. How can we live this new life in Christ with strength and passion to be a good witness? Paul tells us to remember our past – "Wherefore remember..."

This verb "remember" is special. It is a command. The Chinese text rightly uses the phrase "應當 (Eph. 2:11)", I believe, to reinforce the strength of the original text. Paul is saying, we must not forget what we once were and we must not forget what we now are. This verb "remember" is also in the present tense meaning that we are to continually remember how far we have come with God!

As a child of God, we experience the greatness of God's power flowing through us to overcome sin and temptation, to endure trials and afflictions. Whereas before we are saved, we are lost in bondage to sin and we have no power to overcome sin, to have

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19 February 2017*

peace and joy even amidst suffering. So Paul tells us in verses 11-12 that we have come long way.

11 *Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:*

Do not forget how or who we were before we receive spiritual life. We were, verse 12 tells us, before we were saved (1) Christ-less (2) Stateless (3) Friendless (4) Hopeless (5) Godless.

I come from a home that worships idols for as long as I could remember, holding joss sticks and burning incense. My mother in particular could remember how she wakes up early in the morning to wait on these idols for more than 30 years that never gave her true peace and joy. It was such a relieve for her after she believes Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour that she laid down the burden of ever lighting and carrying a joss stick again.

This was how the Jews describe the unbelieving – Gentiles in the flesh – the Uncircumcised. Circumcision was the sign that God gave to Israel to signify that they belong to God. The Jew is circumcised the 8th day from birth (Philippians 3:5). This distinguished the Jews from the nations of the world.

As gentiles, the Ephesian Christians, mainly Greeks, were not a part of the promises of God. They do not have a part in God's blessings. We were lost sinners in the flesh. We were lost and undone and without Christ.

The gospel is the only hope in the world today. Everything else has been tried and found wanting. Everything else has failed. We are born under the wrath of God. We do not know God and we are evil by nature. Our greatest need is to be reconciled with God, have our sins forgiven, to know God as our Father, to be blessed by Him and to start as a child of God.¹

Verses 11-12 tells us how we were lost and verse 13-18 tells us how we have been found, like an orphan, needing refuge. There is this story of a drunkard's child. Its tells us...

The Drunkard's Child

My father is a drunkard,
My mother she is dead,
And I am just an orphan child—
No place to lay my head.
All through this world I wander,
They drive me from their door;
Someday I'll find a welcome
On Heaven's golden shore.
Now, if to me you'll listen,
I'll tell you a story sad

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authentic Christianity*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999, 1, 8, 12.

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Adult Sunday School
Ephesians, Lesson 4
19 February 2017*

How drinking rum and the gambling "hell,"
Has stole away my dad.
My mother is in Heaven
Where God and the angels smile.
And now I know she's watching
Her lonely orphan child.
We all were once so happy
And had a happy home,
Till dad he went to drinking rum,
And then he gambled some.
He left my darling mother,
She died of a broken heart;
And as I tell my story,
I see your teardrops start.
Don't weep for me and mother,
Although I know it's sad,
But try and get someone to cheer
And save poor lonely dad.
I'm awful cold and hungry—
He closed his eyes and sighed,
And those who heard his story
Knew the orphan child had died.
—Author Unknown²

This is the sad picture of the misery of sin in this world! Paul is telling us to remember our desperate situation before God saved us.

13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

The blood of Christ can wash away our sins. This orphan together with his mother knew God. Only his father was lost in sin and will not repent. It is sad. But for all who will repent, there is hope!

14 For he is our peace...

Jesus Christ is our peace. Through Him, we receive true peace. The message of the Bible is that God is a God of peace, and produces the peace and makes peace, in and through His only begotten son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.³

This world has yet seen true peace. War characterizes all the history of mankind. It has been estimated that in the past 4000 years there have been less than 300 without a major war. "Peace is merely that brief moment in history when everybody stops to reload." Why is the world in this state?

² Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

³ To help us explain this, turn to **Hebrews 13:20-21** *Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

*Blessed Hope Bible-Presbyterian Church
Adult Sunday School
Ephesians, Lesson 4
19 February 2017*

When God created the earth, it was to be a peaceful paradise. But Adam forfeited the harmony when he sinned. Adam's sin "was like a declaration of war against God's right to rule His own creation. It broke the peace of Eden. Adam's rebellion against God had disastrous long-range effects.

It set the entire human race at enmity with God. All the evils that disrupted the peacefulness of our earthly existence stemmed from the curse of sin that began with Adam. Sin always causes separation.

God had to choose a people to be separated unto Himself and Israel was God's chosen nation. God designed Israel to be distinct from the rest of the nations of the world by their manner of life and worship that points the nations to the living and true God. And out of Israel will come the Saviour of the world.

14...who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; **15** Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

Paul is writing these things to the Gentiles as a group. For 2,000 years, from Abraham to Christ, God chose to work almost exclusively with the Jews. If you were a Gentile, the only way that you could know God and have your sins forgiven was to be circumcised and follow the Jewish rituals and sacrificial system. Even then, the Jews considered you a second-class citizen.

There was a special court in the temple, the court of the Gentiles, where you could worship from a distance. But you could not go beyond the dividing wall, at the threat of your life (Acts 21:28-29).

Acts 21:28-29 *Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. 29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)*

But now, in Christ, that barrier of the dividing wall has been broken down (Eph. 2:14). Christ has reconciled the Jews and Gentiles to God and to one another through the cross.⁴

Through the cross, Christ reconciled us all to one another and to God, no more distinctions between Jews or Gentiles, no distinction of race or colour, rich or poor.

The gentile Christians did not need to follow the ceremonial laws of the Jews. The only laws that needed to be obeyed – (1) they abstain from pollutions of idols, and (2) from fornication, and (3) from things strangled, and (4) from blood (Acts 15:20).

16 *And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:*

Redemption history is the long saga of how God Himself intervenes to save the human race from its own sin, overthrow evil and restore peace to His creation. It is sin that

⁴ <http://www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/110407M.pdf>

*Blessed Hope Bible-Presbyterian Church
Adult Sunday School
Ephesians, Lesson 4
19 February 2017*

plunged all humanity in animosity and perpetual war. But on the cross, peace is made, all enmity melted away, washed by the blood of the Lamb.

17 *And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.
18* *For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

This is what Jesus did when He came on earth to reconcile the lost to God. How did Jesus bring the lost to God?

Matthew 9:35-38 *And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.*

It is firstly "hard work". The adjective "all" and "every" was used three times to describe the scope of Jesus' work. It was comprehensive. He covered the grounds, left no corner of cities and villages not evangelized. Indeed, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:15b cf. Isa. 52:7). It is demanding physically speaking. Our Lord went about all the cities and villages and **He was among the people**. We can see imagine the picture of physical weariness and toil in the work of the gospel. It required physical, mental and spiritual endurance. It is a greatly sacrificial work. And yet highly rewarding for it is the souls of men and women snatched from the clutches of hell and transported to the glory of heaven. Our Lord demonstrated to us this commitment for our emulation.

The principal activities were preaching and praying. He was spreading the good news of the gospel to all who were willing to listen. And Jesus taught. He showed to them the true sense of the laws of God in Matthew 5-7. How do we live our lives in the light of God's Word that will bring God's blessings! He also healed the sick. These mighty works authenticated Jesus' credentials as the living and true God. Today, we do not possess such supernatural power of miracle healing but we can pray for the needs of those we meet, acknowledging that power comes from God, and we submit ourselves to His sovereign power and will to heal.

36 *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*

It is also "heart work". As He saw their lost estate, it drove Him to action. Jesus felt deeply for them. He is the good Shepherd who cared for His sheep. This unconditional and sacrificial love is God's power flowing in the life of God's children. It comes as an overflow of the Holy Spirit's power in the believer's heart. It comes because the child of God has been touched by God's love. Jesus demonstrated the greatness of this love in His ministry on earth.

For God's children, the work of soul winning flows out of a heart gratitude and indebtedness because we have been forgiven much, though undeserved. Unless we realize our lost estate and experienced in our hearts the reconciliation with God by the finished work of Christ on the cross, we cannot live out this love. It keeps us humble and loving.

Jesus came and preached peace to all which were afar off (cannot discern right from left), and to them that were nigh (to them He came to save).

*Blessed Hope Bible-Presbyterian Church
Adult Sunday School
Ephesians, Lesson 4
19 February 2017*

37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; 38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

It is Holy-Spirit led work - Jesus utilized a farming imagery to help us to see the urgency of the work. When the farmer first sows, there is a season of cultivation, where he waters and fertilizes. But when harvest time comes, the entire field is ready at the same time. This is the picture of the harvest that Jesus wants us to see. It is urgent to reap quickly the fruits of the harvest before they turn bad, before the birds come and the worms and insects come to feed on them. He is showing to us the vast field of work still undone.

Jesus urged His disciples to pray. For no man by himself can discharge this work unless the Lord raises him or her up and endows him with the strength and ability to go forth. There are a great number of people who needs instruction but there are few able to instruct these needy people in the ways of righteousness and truth. Pray the Lord by His Spirit would call, train and commission more to serve in this ripe harvest field. May the Lord help you to prepare well.

This is our first thought as we consider the progress of the church – we are to bring the lost to God remembering how we ourselves were lost if God had not sent someone to share the gospel of peace to us.

This leads us to the second thought – Building Up the Saved in God (v19-22).

(2) Building Up the Saved in God (v19-22)

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

All who have been saved become the people of God, the church. Paul now uses 3 images well known to the people of that time to describe the nature of the church: fellow citizens (v19a), members of a family – the household of God (v19b) and a temple (v20-22). In this second thought, we see God gathering His people into His kingdom and having gathered them also build them up, prepare them for their ultimate destination.

The principle in verse 19 is that believers have gained a new citizenship, a heavenly citizenship.

Philippians 3:20 *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:*

We are to be prepared for heaven. How can we do so? By being built up in our faith – absent from the body is present with the Lord.

Testimony

We visited a sister in Christ who had just received the Lord several years back. She has a condition of the body called lupers that causes her to be in unbearable constant pain, taking 2 meters to go to toilet will take her ½ hour. She told us that she now prays every day and now her condition seemed to be worsened. We assured her that God's grace

*Blessed Hope Bible-Presbyterian Church
Adult Sunday School
Ephesians, Lesson 4
19 February 2017*

with her to help her in her sufferings. And taught her from God's word that this earthen vessel is always deteriorating and one day will have to give way. We are all on that journey. But we now have the assurance from God's Word that absent from the body is present with the Lord. Although the outward man grows weaker day by day the inner man is to be renewed and strengthened by His Word for the day will come when we will enter heaven's door - no more pain, no more tears, no more suffering, no more sin.

We now belong to the household of God, we are brothers and sisters in Christ who cares for her and who prays for her. I assured her that the church, God's people, is praying for her.

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

This third illustration depicts the church as a building, and Jesus being the chief corner stone. The most significant part of the foundation of any large building was the cornerstone. This stone bore much of the weight of the building. Archaeologists have recently discovered five enormous building stones that helped form the foundation of the Jerusalem temple. The largest stone measured 55 feet long, 11 feet high and 14 feet wide and is estimated to weigh 570 tons. Jesus is the significant cornerstone of the church. The whole building is established on Him, including the foundation laid by the apostles and the prophets.⁵

This foundation refers to the Scriptures in completed form, the Old and New Testaments in the Bible we hold in our hands today. This is the basis in which we build our faith.

*21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:
22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

We are being prepared for heaven where the church will one day be assembled to worship Him in heaven. In Rev. 5, we see the church triumphant in worship in heaven. May the Lord prepare us for that day!

CONCLUSION

The progress of the church - Bringing the Lost to God (v11-18), Building up the Saved in God (v19-22), the Lord help His church to advance in His strength. Amen.

⁵ Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3, Zondervan, 2002, 318-319.