

Brought Near By Christ's Blood

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Text: Ephesians 2:11-22

Introduction:

- I. It is a true statement that a Christian cannot fully appreciate his current situation unless he fully understands his past condition as a sinner.
 - A. Peter wrote that it is important for Christians to remember that they were cleansed from their former sins, i.e., remember their past (2 Peter 1:5-9).
 - B. Corollary: The sinner cannot fully appreciate the promised spiritual blessings in Christ until he realizes the terrible consequences of his current situation.
- II. These truths may suggest the motivation of Paul as he wrote to the Ephesian Christians.
 - A. He vividly described their past.
 - B. He also described the changes in their spiritual condition as a result of divine grace.
 - C. He actually did this twice in Ephesians 2!
- III. When we read Ephesians 2, we need to see ourselves in that passage!

Body:

- I. **The Context** (Ephesians 1:3-2:10)
 - A. “We” versus “You” – a change of subjects
 1. Notice the use of first-person pronouns in 1:3-12.
 - a. “In him we have obtained...” (v. 11) ¹
 - b. Although Paul could be referring to all Christians, including himself and the Ephesians, it appears that 1:12 is a specific reference to Jewish Christians (“...so that we who were the first to hope in Christ...”).
 2. Beginning in 1:13, however, there is a consistent (although not absolute; e.g., v. 14 - ἡμῶν) change from first-person pronouns to second-person pronouns.
 - a. “In him you also...” (v. 13)
 - b. Paul continued to use the second-person pronoun in 1:15-18.
 - c. In 2:11, Paul clearly connected the second-person pronoun with Gentiles.
 - 1) Although “Gentile” was sometimes used to indicate unbelievers in general, regardless of ethnicity (e.g., 1 Peter 2:12), it is obvious that “Gentiles” does not have that meaning in verse 11.
 - 2) The people under consideration were “Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, ... alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise” (2:11-12).
 - 3) They were also described as “far off” as opposed to those who were “near” (2:13, 17). The Gentiles were considered “far off” with regard to their relationship to God.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

3. Paul alternated between first person and second person in his use of pronouns in 2:1-10, perhaps thereby hinting at the major point he would make in 2:11-22.
- B. As Paul related the substance of his prayers on behalf of the Ephesians (1:15-21), he expressed his desire that they know (verb in verse 19, supplied from verse 18) “the immeasurable greatness of his power,” i.e., of God the Father.
1. That power was manifested in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ.
 - a. ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, **(Ephesians 1:19–20)**
 2. The connection between Paul’s sentence in 1:20 and that of 2:1 is not obvious in the English translations, particularly in the ESV, which “smooths” the Greek in translation.
 - a. The connection can be seen, however, in the NKJV which italicizes the verb supplied from 1:20.
 - 1) ¹ And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, **(Ephesians 2:1; NKJV)**
 - 2) The condition of the Ephesians had changed as a result of God’s mercy and love (2:4-10).
 - 3) Paul’s point seems to be that God did for sinners as He had done for Christ Jesus – raised them (from spiritual death in the case of sinners) and exalted them (seated them in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus).
 - 4) The same power that raised Jesus physically from the dead is responsible for the spiritual resurrection accomplished in conversion.
- C. As Paul described the substance of his prayers for the Ephesians in 1:15-21, he indicated what he wanted them to understand.
1. Verse 18 provides some insight into his purpose in 2:11-22.
 - a. ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, **(Ephesians 1:18)**
 - b. Note the repetition of the word “riches” in 1:18 and 2:7.
 2. To emphasize their hope and the “inheritance” in the saints, Paul rehearsed their past and contrasted it with their present. There is an obvious parallelism between the two pericopes (2:1-10 and 2:11-22).
 - a. They had been “dead” in sin (2:1-3), but were made alive by God (2:4-10).
 - b. They had been alienated from God and His blessings (2:11-12), but brought near by the blood of Christ (2:13-17).
- D. O’Brien summarizes the relationship between 2:1-10 and 2:11-22 as follows:
1. “The apostle begins a new section of the letter and reminds his readers of their past as unconverted Gentiles who had formerly stood outside the covenant promises to Israel. At the same time this paragraph is linked with and parallel to the preceding one (2:1-10) by means of the once—now schema which is dominant throughout (vv. 11-13, 19). The contrast between the past and the present, which has been viewed in the earlier passage in terms of living in disobedience, sin, and bondage over against salvation, new life, and being seated with Christ (2:1-10), is now set forth in salvation-historical

categories, particularly in terms of the readers pre-Christian past in relation to Israel's special position within God's saving purposes. Once again the gravity of their previous situation serves to magnify the wonder of God's grace. As with vv. 1-10, the past is recalled, not because the emphasis falls upon it, but in order to draw attention to Christ's mighty work on their behalf (vv. 14-18), to encourage an attitude of profound thankfulness to God, and to urge the readers to accept all that is involved in being God's new creation in Christ." (O'Brien, 184-185)

II. "At One Time"

A. "...remember..." (2:11, 12; μνημονεύω – the Greek word appears in verse 11 and is supplied by translators [ESV] in verse 12)

1. "This summons to remember is akin to the appeal of Deuteronomy to the Israelites to recall their slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22). This was not simply a recalling of certain facts or situations, nor was it just a mental activity. It involved an evaluation of what had happened, and an acting upon it as a result... Schnackenburg, 102-3, calls this use of theology and address ('you') in the exposition an *anamnēsis* (from the verb 'remember'). It is 'not intended to bring any new instruction but simply to remind the readers of the knowledge' they had already received in order to make them more aware of it and to encourage them to respond appropriately." (O'Brien, footnote 125)
2. The two translations of "remember" are separated by the identification of Paul's readers as "Gentiles in the flesh."
3. As Paul reminded the Gentiles of how they were viewed ("uncircumcision") by the Jews, he also described the Jews as "the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands."
 - a. It is telling that the apostle used the phrase "in the flesh" with regard to the uncircumcised **and** the circumcised.
 - b. Although Best argues that Paul's point is not to contrast outward, fleshly circumcision with the circumcision which is of the heart (see Romans 2:28-29), his inclusion of the phrase "in the flesh" with reference to the Jewish circumcision may also be a subtle comment about the failure of the Jews to keep the covenant.²

B. "Separated from Christ"

1. Since it is clear that the Jew was also in need of reconciliation (the opposite of being separated) with God, it is significant that Paul noted their separation from "Christ."
2. The messianic hope generated through the prophecies of the Old Testament belonged to the Jews, not the Gentiles.

C. "Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel"

1. Although there were other peoples who practiced circumcision, circumcision served as a sign of the covenant made with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11) and thus a sign of separation from the Gentiles.
2. "And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you." (**Genesis 17:7**)

² Best, 238. I am not convinced that Best is right on this point. Although fleshly circumcision was indeed a demarcation between Jew and Gentile, Paul will go on to intimate that the Jew was also separated from God and in need of reconciliation. See Foulkes, 87.

D. "Strangers to the covenants of promise"

1. This is most likely a reference to the promise made to Abraham and reiterated to Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 12:3; 26:3-5; 28:14).
2. Bock includes the promises made to "Moses (Exod. 24:1-8), David (2 Sam. 7:12-17; Pss 89:3-4, 26-37; 132:11-12) and the nation at large (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:38-40; Ezek. 36:23-36)" that provided detail to the Abrahamic promise. (Bock, 75)

E. The next two descriptive phrases present the result of the previous three. ³

1. "Having no hope"
 - a. As Paul noted in Ephesians 3:6, the Gentiles were "partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." Although the Gentiles would eventually participate in the promise (i.e., all nations would be blessed), they didn't historically have the same hope as the Jews.
 - b. Paul elsewhere identified the hope of the Jews with the general resurrection into life.
 - 1) ¹⁴ But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, ¹⁵ having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. (**Acts 24:14-15**)
 - 2) ⁶ And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! ⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? (**Acts 26:6-8**)
 - 3) For the Gentiles, "Christ in you" was the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).
2. "Without God in the world" ⁴
 - a. "Without a messianic hope and without a covenant connection to God with its hope of deliverance and life, Gentiles were on the outside looking in as far as Paul is concerned. There is irony here, because Gentiles followed many gods and considered monotheists like Christians and Jews as atheists for not having their array of gods." (Bock, 75)
 - b. Bunting comments on this point: "The Gentile possessed no Messiah in which to hope, had no share in the nation of the one true God, and held no agreement with God concerning their future. He was, therefore, completely cut off from his Creator, with no anticipation of any improvement. The only promise benefitting the Gentile was one given to Abraham and the Jews that would finally be satisfied in Jesus Christ (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:17-18)." (Bunting, 111-112)

F. O'Brien summarizes this entire section: "Five deficiencies of these Gentile Christian readers are listed, and all of them have to do with their being outside God's people, Israel, and his

³ This conclusion is based on the apparent cause-and-effect relationship of the phrases, rather than the Greek grammar (both "alienated" and having" are translated from participles).

⁴ The phrase "without God" is a translation of ἄθεος. Vine comments, "in Eph. 2:12 the phrase indicates, not only that the Gentiles were void of any true recognition of God, and hence became morally 'godless' (Rom. 1:19-32) but that being given up by God, they were excluded from communion with God and from the privileges granted to Israel (see the context and cf. Gal. 4:8)."

saving purposes. By describing their spiritual predicament in these terms the apostle makes plain that the privileges given to Israel were substantial indeed. A similar point about the divine blessings bestowed on Israel, though for a somewhat different purpose, is made by the apostle in Romans 9. Not only were the Jews entrusted with the very words of God (Rom. 3:2), but also theirs is the adoption as sons, ... the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ (Rom. 9:4, 5). From all of these privileges Paul's Gentile readers had been excluded." (O'Brien, 187)

III. "But Now"

- A. The previous phrases used to describe the Gentiles are perhaps summed up in the phrase "you who once were far off" (v. 13).
- B. The change in the condition of the Gentiles was the result of reconciliation, the effect of the sacrificial death on the cross (v. 13).
 1. Paul referred to the death of Jesus in several ways: "by the blood of Christ" (v. 13), "in his flesh" (v. 14), and "through the cross" (v. 16).
 2. Note the repetition of "in him" or similar phrases, emphasizing the relationship associated with this changed condition (vv. 13, 15, 21 [2x], 22).
 3. "Through him" in verse 18 is perhaps better described as emphasizing instrumentality, as opposed to relationship.
 4. "This paragraph provides one of the most wonderful descriptions of peace and reconciliation within the Pauline letters. Here both the horizontal and vertical dimensions to this central salvation blessing are treated within the framework of God's saving plan. Further, the centrepiece of this comprehensive reconciliation, and the fundamental theological undergirding of the whole letter, is to be found in vv. 14-18, where believers come near to God and to one another (Gentiles and Jews) through the saving death of the Lord Jesus Christ." (O'Brien, 182)
 5. Paul first emphasized the reconciliation between Jew and Gentile (vv. 14-16), but concluded by noting the reconciliation of both peoples to God (vv. 17-18).
 - a. Christ is such an integral part of the reconciliation that He is said to be "our peace" (v. 14; note that in v. 15b, He "makes peace"). This is much like Jesus saying that He is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) or John writing that "God is love" (1 John 4:8).
 - b. Peace between Jew and Gentile was accomplished by means of His cross, at which point He had "broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14).
 - 1) There are some differences between the translations of the ESV and NKJV in verses 14-15, raising the question, "Is the 'dividing wall of hostility' to be equated with the 'law of commandments' or merely the result of that law?"
 - a) ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **(Ephesians 2:14-15)**
 - b) ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so

as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace,
(Ephesians 2:14–15; NKJV)

2) Observations:

- a) In the Nestle-Aland text (28th Edition), the phrase τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ appears at the end of verse 14. In the Byzantine text (the text behind the NKJV), the exact same phrase appears at the beginning of verse 15. The order of the Greek text is the same; the difference is in the division of verses.
- b) There is a chiasmic structure in these verses, if one follows the order of the Greek text rather than either of the above translations. This structure can be illustrated as follows: ⁵

A – For He himself is our peace

B – who has made both one

C – who has broken down the dividing wall, the enmity

D – in His flesh

C' – who abolished the law of commandments

B' – that He might create one new man from the two

A' – so making peace

- c) The Law of Moses, given only to the Israelites, provided them with a special position as God's chosen people and, at the same time and as a consequence, created a division between Jew and Gentile.
1. The death of Jesus abolished the law of commandments, at the same time breaking down the hostility which was the result of that law (vv. 14, 16).
 - a. ⁴ Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. **(Romans 7:4)**
 - b. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. **(Colossians 2:13–14)**
 - d) In summary, Paul appears to be equating the “middle wall of separation” with “the law of commandments.” By breaking down that wall, the cause of hostility between Jew and Gentiles was “killed” (v. 16). The connection between the “middle wall of separation” and the hostility was so strong that Paul described that wall as “hostility.” ⁶
- 3) The division between Jew and Gentile was visually emphasized in the Herodian temple in Jerusalem by the *soreq*, the wall which marked for Gentiles the limit of proximity to the temple sanctuary and prevented them

⁵ This summary follows structure suggested in the chart of Ephesians 2:14-15 as found in Smelser, 117.

⁶ My thanks to Jeff Smelser, Edwin Crozier and Perry Hall for their insight in this area.

from approaching the actual sanctuary, i.e, getting “near” the presence of God, on penalty of death.⁷

a) Smelser makes a compelling argument that Paul had in mind this wall as he wrote to the Ephesians.⁸

b) Of course, the literal temple wall wasn't broken down at the death of Christ, even as the temple sacrifices continued to be made after His death.

c. Paul described the result or process of reconciliation between Jew and Gentile in several ways, using the key word “one”:

1) “Made us both one” (v. 14)

2) “Might create in himself one new man in place of the two” (v. 15)

3) “Might reconcile us both to God in one body” (v. 16)

C. He preached peace to those who were far off and those who were near (v. 17).

1. In truth, the Jew who was “near” (in the sense of having the Law, etc.) was also separated from God by his sins, identified by the Law.
2. In addition to “making peace” between Jew and Gentile, the effect of the cross was to reconcile both to God (v. 16).
3. The reconciliation (and thus “access”) of these groups to the Father is not through two different paths, but “by” (NKJV) one Spirit (v. 18).

IV. “So then”

A. Much as the last two descriptive phrases in verse 12 (“having no hope and without God in the world”) are the result of the three previous phrases, verses 19-22 present the result of the reconciliation (vertical and horizontal) discussed in the preceding verses (vv. 13-18).

B. The Gentiles were “no longer strangers and aliens, but... fellow citizens with the saints and members of the house of God” (v. 19).

1. The word translated “strangers” is the same as in verse 12 (ξένος).
2. The word translated “aliens” is πάροικος, with the etymological meaning of “dwelling near or along side.”⁹ It doesn't refer, however, to a citizen neighbor, but to a sojourner, one who dwells in proximity, but doesn't belong.
3. In their relationship with Christ, the Gentiles had gone from strangers to “fellow citizens with the saints.”
 - a. In verse 12, the Gentiles were described as “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.”

⁷ “At the inner edge of this *hél* there was a stone parapet called *sórēq* (ג.ר'ר).η On this tablets were put with inscriptions warning non-Jews against passing beyond this boundary. One such was found in recent years by the French consul, Clermont-Ganneau, on which, in Greek, the following words occur: μηθένα ἀλλογενή εισπορεύεσθαι ἐντὸς τοῦ περὶ τὸ ἱερόν τρυφάκτου καὶ περιβόλου. ὅς δ' ἂν λήφθῃ ἐαυτῷ αἴτος ἔσται διὰ τὸ ἐξακολουθεῖν θάνατον, i.e. ‘No stranger is to enter within the balustrade and embankment round the sacred place. Whoever is caught will be answerable for his death, which will ensue.’ (Hastings, Vol. 4, 713-714).

⁸ Smelser, 117-120. He ably addresses some objections to this view as well.

⁹ Vine.

- b. The word translated “commonwealth” (πολιτεία) is elsewhere translated “citizenship” (although Vine assigns a different meaning here) and is a cognate for the noun meaning “citizen” (πολίτης; the word used in verse 19 is συμπολίτης).
- 1) The “once-now” contrast is again highlighted by the use of these words.
 - 2) The Gentiles did not become citizens of physical Israel, but are now citizens “with the saints.” The use of this phrase perhaps emphasizes that their citizenship is not actually an inclusion in the physical nation of Israel, but with a group of “holy” people, in a holy nation (cf. 1 Peter 2:9; Philippians 3:20).
 - 3) “The use of the Old Testament Scriptures in this key paragraph, both explicitly (cf. vv. 13, 17) and by way of allusion or echo (cf. vv. 19-22), underscores the note of continuity between Gentile Christians and the promises of God to Israel (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 49:5, 6). But, if anything, there is a greater emphasis in this paragraph on the element of discontinuity: the new community of which these Gentiles have become a part is not simply a development out of Israel. It is a new creation (v. 15), not some kind of amalgam made out of the best elements of Israel and the Gentiles. The resulting new humanity transcends the two old entities, even though unbelieving Israel and disobedient Gentiles continue to exist. The privileges Gentiles enjoy are based upon but transcend the blessings promised to Israel (vv. 19-22).” (O’Brien, 183-184)
 4. Perhaps in an even more intimate relationship than citizenship, they are members of the “household of God,” another description of their “belonging.” Christians are members of God’s spiritual family.

C. Laying figure upon figure, Paul abruptly moved to an architectural image. The Gentiles were not only members of God’s household, but also part of a structure “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (v. 20; see 1 Corinthians 3 for a similar metaphor with a slightly different emphasis).

1. The position of “prophets” in the text perhaps suggests that Paul had in mind prophets of the New Testament era rather than the Old Testament prophets.
2. The apostles and prophets, along with Christ, constituted the foundation of this building inasmuch as they revealed the truth that enables individuals (here, the Gentiles) to become part of the building.
3. Although the word translated “cornerstone” (ἀκρογωνιάος; *akrogoniaios*) is sometimes given the definition of “capstone,” the previous mention of a foundation favors the idea of a (“chief” – NKJV; a nod to the *akros* part of the compound word) cornerstone.¹⁰
 - a. Other passages that mention a cornerstone include Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16. Both of these passages are quoted by Peter (1 Peter 2:6-7).
 - b. In the quotation in 1 Peter 2:7 (Psalm 118:22), “cornerstone” is literally “head of [the] corner.”
 - c. Peter likewise refers to Christians as constituting “living stones” in a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5).

¹⁰ Smelser makes a good case for “cornerstone” rather than “capstone.” (130-133)

4. A chief cornerstone determines three lines of a building, i.e., length, width and plumb. It is "in him" (v. 21) that the "whole structure, being joined together" grows into a holy temple.
 - a. "Being joined together" reiterates the changed condition of the Gentiles with regard to the Jews.
 - b. "This temple is **fitly framed together** (*sunarmologoumene*) as each new person of faith is fitted together with the others. The Greek word is a compilation of three words: *sun*, with; *harmos*, a joint or ligature where two are bound together; *lego*, to choose. God chooses to join us together with the others and that builds up his house. Such meshing of persons adds meaning and beauty to the continuously growing spiritual house of God." (emphasis in the original - asd) (Caldwell, 104)
 - c. The present tense of the verb "grows" (v. 21) supports the idea that the structure continues to be built as more people come into a relationship with the Lord.
5. This structure is a holy temple, a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (v. 22).
 - a. Paul elsewhere described a local congregation and even individual Christians as a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19).
 - b. "The new community, God's fellowship of reconciliation, transcends all distinctions of race, status, and sex. Properly oriented to the one cornerstone, based on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Gentile Christians, along with their fellow-believers of Jewish birth, belonged equally to God's holy house. As the God of Israel had once taken up residence in the wilderness tabernacle and later in the Jerusalem temple by his name and his glory, so now by his Spirit he makes the fellowship of believers, Jewish and Gentile alike, his chosen dwelling-place. No privilege is bestowed on the people of God in which Gentiles do not enjoy an equal share." (Bruce, 307)
 - c. "It is not the general word (*hieron*) that described the whole of the temple precincts, but that used for the inner shrine (*naos*). The temple in Old Testament days, and especially considered as *naos*, was above all else the special meeting-place between God and his people. It was the place on which the glory of God descended, the place of his presence. When Christ came, he made obsolete the tabernacle or temple made with hands. He himself was the place of the divine dwelling among men, a truth that is expressed particularly in John 1:14 and 2:19-21. That temple is no longer among us, but now God seeks as his *dwelling place* the lives of men and women who will allow him to enter by his Spirit." (Foulkes, 95)

Conclusion:

- I. Addressing Gentile Christians, Paul reminded them of the dramatic change that had occurred in their spiritual condition.
 - A. The death of Jesus on the cross effected reconciliation, both horizontal (Jew and Gentile) and vertical (Jew and Gentile to God).
 - B. Gentiles who had been "far off" were able to be "connected" to God and participate in the same blessings as Jewish Christians.
- II. Bunting gives a good summary of the key themes in this pericope: "For Christians to effectively grow in Christ, they must fully appreciate their spiritual blessings and completely embrace their spiritual responsibilities. To accomplish that purpose in the saints at Ephesus, Paul reminds them of their former condition outside of Christ. He calls to mind two powerful metaphors, death and alienation, to illustrate the condition of man in sin. Death, the loss of life, results in the loss of

purpose, productivity, and value. Alienation, the loss of fellowship, results in the loss of association, identity, and connection. In Christ, one worthlessly dead is raised to do good works and one lost and lonely is brought near!" (Bunting, *Blessed Be God*, 109)

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