

Ephesians 2 (Part 3): 11-13 • Brought Near to God

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Ephesians chapter 2. Well while you're turning there, I was just pondering our worship time.

One of the things I encourage the worship leaders to do, is to be led by the Holy Spirit. And I don't tell them what songs to do for Sunday morning or Wednesday night for that matter. I try to keep my hands out of that candy dish and just let them do what the Lord... And not only that, but I pray with them and exhort them that, I want them to be vessels to be led. And assuming that took place this morning, you'll notice that we were repeating that refrain, I exalt you, I exalt thee, Lord. Just the chorus from that old song.

And sometimes I wonder if we really know what we're saying when we say to the Lord, I exalt you. It's to lift Him up above all things, all else. I mean, it's putting Him in that leadership role as Ken was very graciously, praying with us about that whole concept of crowning Him King, making Him Lord, submitting to His Lordship in our lives.

But there's a lot of things in our life that trouble us. And from time to time when we become fearful, or we become frustrated, or whatever the case might be, we tend to glom onto those things and take them back into our own realm of control for whatever reason.

And then we come to church and we start singing, I exalt thee. And I don't know about you, but I'm reminded when I say that, I'm instantly convicted as I'm sitting there saying, I exalt thee. I'm thinking, yeah, kind of. I mean, if I'm going to really be honest with the Lord, it's like, I want to exalt thee, I'm trying to exalt thee. Really want to exalt thee, O Lord. You know what I mean?

Isn't that what's really going on? I mean, you want to be honest with the Lord as you're singing those things. And it's, many times these worship songs that we sing are the ideal. It's like, this is where I want to be. This is where I want to be, but I recognize, even while I'm singing it, that I'm not there. Like (apostle) Paul even said, brothers, I have not yet attained to these things, I haven't arrived. But

this one thing I do, forgetting what is behind, straining toward what is ahead and on and on and on. I'm shooting for the goal. (Philippians 3:12-14)

Lord, I want to exalt you in my life. I want to exalt you. Teach me how to exalt you in my life. Teach me how to put you above everything else. I want to put you above my marriage, my home, my family. I want to...

That's not to say that I put those things in a place where I don't care, but I put those in a place where the priority of serving you, loving you, submitting to you, is in its proper place, so that those things can be in order. And so that I stop taking those things in my hands and trying to fix them, resolve them, or whatever the case might be.

I think you guys know what I'm talking about. I think a lot of you are probably going through some pretty challenging, pretty frustrating circumstances in your life. Could be family matters, could be financial matters, could be just relational issues, even your own emotions.

And those things press pretty personally into our lives, into our hearts. And the temptation is absolutely enormous to just stretch out our own hands and fix. I'm going to fix, or I'm just going to... And sometimes fixing means any number of things. Sometimes it means getting rid of something or, but it's just, it's us doing the fixing, you know what I mean?

And this is one of those times when the Lord reminds us, if you're going to really exalt me in your life to the highest place, you're going to submit to my will, my heart, my purpose, my ability to resolve, my ability to fix.

Can I tell you guys a secret? He's better at fixing than we are. I know shocker, right, but He is. But here's the problem. Many times He asks us to wait for Him to do His work. I know, I can see some of your blood pressure rising as I say that. That's hard to do. It's really hard to do. To wait on the Lord, to wait for His deliverance, to wait for His answer. But let me tell you something, He's good at what He does. You and I, we're going to screw it up every time. But He is so good.

Let's get into Ephesians, shall we? Ephesians chapter 2, this is our third installment in the second chapter of Ephesians. And we're going to take 3 verses today, okay? Beginning at verse 11.

Follow along with me, please. It says, *"Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the*

circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (ESV)

Stop there, please and let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we dig into your Word here this morning and unpack these verses, we really are praying and expecting you to speak to our hearts as only you can, Lord, God. Bring wisdom and insight, bring direction and understanding.

Teach us today Lord, for you are the teacher, we want to be the students. But we recognize, Lord God, that we need ears to hear, and eyes to see, hearts to receive.

Do that work in us, we ask. Jesus precious name, amen.

You'll notice that Paul begins in these, just these 3 verses, by addressing those of us who are what he refers to as, “*Gentiles in the flesh*.” I assume that we're all Gentiles, probably in this room, today.

It's funny because in the Bible, you really have 2 people groups that really matter. You have Jews and then you have everybody else. And everybody else is a Gentile and that means that a definition of a Gentile is a non-Jew.

Even though you and I may come from different backgrounds, some of you are European. Some of you are Hispanic. Some of you are any number of other mixtures. Let's just face it, we're all mutts, aren't we? I mean, we're just mongrels.

My dad had a, I think a predominantly French Canadian kind of a vibe going on and married a woman who was Irish mixed with who knows what all else. Little bit of dachshund, I don't know, just all sorts of... And so, you put all those things together and we're mutts we're just mongrels.

But essentially, the Bible refers to us as Gentiles, and the Jews would refer to you and I as, the uncircumcision. Yeah, unless you think that's a prideful..., no, that's not, that's pretty much a term of derision. Because you see, they called themselves the circumcision, and they called themselves that because of the covenant sign that God had made with them to show His special relationship to

them. God gave to Abraham the sign of circumcision and so the Jews referred to themselves as, the circumcision.

And again, that pointed to the fact that they were special. And that's the way they saw it and they would refer to every Gentile as, the uncircumcised, or, the uncircumcision.

You'll remember when David came out to the battle lines and was listening to this talk going on about this Goliath character. And then Goliath strolled up and started shouting his profanities and blasphemies against the Lord God. Remember what David said? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God and da, da, da. (1 Samuel 17:26) This has been going on for a long time as far as how people referred to Gentiles.

But the reason that we're looking at this whole thing and the reason Paul is making the distinction is for a couple of reasons. And first it's to define or to I guess highlight the fact that the Jews have a very special and prominent position with God and the Gentiles don't, basically.

I mean you think about the Jews and you think, wow! What other nation on earth did God treat like the Jews? None. There's no other nation on the face of the earth that God referred to as His treasured possession. There's no other nation on earth that God revealed Himself to the way He did with Israel and the special status that the Jews enjoyed and enjoy today with God is unmatched.

We might sing some of our songs about the United States of America, how, God shed his grace on thee. But you know what? Not like the Jews. Not like the Jews He didn't. You can factor in as many songs as you want. We can't touch what God did to the Jewish nation with a 10 foot pole.

There's actually a section of scripture in the Book of Romans where Paul outlines the blessings that are unique to Israel. Let me put them up on the screen for you, from Romans chapter 9. Goes like this, he says,

Romans 9:4-5 (ESV)

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

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belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, (of course, the same word is Messiah) who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

I mean, boy, you read that passage right there and you think, wow that's quite a list. In fact, if we take that passage and make it into a bulleted list, that's what it comes out to. You've got these various things.

- The adoption
- The glory
- The covenants
- The giving of the Law
- The worship
- The promises
- The Messiah

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- The Messiah

Theirs is the adoption. Theirs as sons is what that refers to, by the way.

Theirs is the glory. The glory. Think about all the times that Israel saw the glory of God, the Shekinah glory of the Lord. During the wilderness for 40 years, they saw the glory of God in the form of a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of cloud during the day. They heard... Did you know that the Jews actually heard God speak the Ten Commandments with His own voice. It rattled the mountain. It looked like the top of the mountain was literally on fire and they heard God literally echo down the mountain, the Ten Commandments. And it says that after God was finished, the people went up to Moses and said, please tell God, don't say anything else or we'll die.

That's literally what they said. They said, you go up the mountain. You hear from God and then you come down and tell us what He said because if we have to hear His voice anymore we won't survive. They were so in awe of the glory of God. When the temple was built, the Bible says that the glory of the Lord filled the temple so much so that the priests couldn't even enter to go do their ministry.

We've made some pretty wonderful buildings here in the United States of America. The White House, Capitol, none of them have ever been filled with the glory of God. It happened to Israel and Israel alone.

Theirs are the covenants. God made His covenants with Israel.

The giving of the law. Boy, you know the law. Much of our law here in the United States of America, do you know, is based on that law that God gave to Israel? How do we know that murder is even wrong except that God laid it out in the law? Stealing, and covetousness, and all the other things that go along with it. The law is beautiful. It'll kill you, dead as a doornail but it's beautiful. There's nothing wrong with the law. It's you and me where there's a problem. God gave the law to Israel. He didn't give the law to any other nation.

The worship, the worship that God gave to Israel that was given to no other country.

The promises.

And then the last thing on the list is the Messiah. I mean, think this thing through with me for just a moment. We think it's pretty cool that God became a human being. Do you understand that in a very specific sense, God became a Jew? He didn't become an American, or a Chinaman, or a German. He became a Jew.

God, eternal, almighty, all powerful, became a Jew through His heritage, through Mary, to the point where you can actually trace His lineage, which the gospel writers do. It's pretty amazing when you stop and think about it. He didn't, again, He didn't become an American. That's not a blessing that we have.

So Paul is beginning to lay out. After he's laid out this list that we've looked at here in Romans, now we come back to Ephesians chapter 2 and we look at how Paul begins to describe Gentiles, those of us who are non-Jews. Look what he says beginning in verse 11. Look with me again in your Bible.

He says, *"Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—"* And I wanted to bring out this point just one more time that the Jews referred to Gentiles as uncircumcised. But you know what else they called Gentiles? Called them dogs. Now that may not seem like a real derogatory term to you and I. Because see, we've domesticated dogs to the point of just... Okay, let's face it guys, alright? You ready? True confession time.

We're weird. We are weird about our dogs. Sorry, we are. We consider them like members of the family. We let them in, sleep on our bed, eat our food, we're weird. Do you know that back in Bible times, dogs were not domesticated as household pets?

They ran in packs, and they were wild, and they were dangerous. And little children were at risk around those wild, roaming packs of dogs. And they scavenged for their food, and they killed livestock, and they carried diseases. And here's the other thing that was, and it's not unique about dogs, it's still true today, dogs live by their stomach, like any other animal.

They don't live by reason, they're governed by their appetites, right? You think your dog's being all friendly, and you think he's saying, I love you. You know what he's saying? Feed me!, right? And we get him, sit up, roll over. He wants that treat. He's governed by his stomach.

And you see, that's why the Jews referred to the Gentiles as dogs, because apart from the law, apart from the revelation of God's Word, Gentiles earned the name of dog, by living after their passions. They lived after their fleshly passions. They did what felt right. They did what they wanted to do based on their flesh, right? Just like dogs do. And that's why the Jews referred to them that way.

It's not a great picture here that we're looking at as it relates to Gentiles before Christ. And Paul explains further here in verse 12. Look with me in your Bible. He says, again, *"remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."*

Wow, we had a beautiful, wonderful list in Romans chapter 9 of all the blessings that God had bestowed upon Israel, then we read about the Gentiles and we're wow, that's kind of lackluster. I mean, you make that into a bulleted list and it looks like this:

- separated
- alienated
- strangers
- having no hope
- Without God

We're:

- separated

- alienated
- strangers
- having no hope
- Without God

And God and the Holy Spirit is moving upon the apostle Paul to speak these things in the Book of Ephesians for a very specific purpose. He wants us to remember. He wants us to remember where we started off and where we are now. But you have to remember that all of these things and keeping them in mind is important.

We started off completely separated from Christ, completely separate. Listen, even though the Jews didn't accept largely Christ for who He was, they were at least connected to Him by birthright and by promise. We had none of that.

In fact, do you guys know, have you ever been reading through the gospel accounts, and have you ever noticed how Jesus responded to Gentiles and has that ever bothered you?

Let me show you a passage from Matthew chapter 15. This is something Jesus said,

Matthew 15:24 (ESV)

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

How do you like that? That kind of put you in your place? That's Jesus Christ the Son of God speaking about us. I didn't actually come directly for them, I came for the lost sheep of Israel. And we Gentiles we read a verse like that in the gospel and we're like, well I think I've just been insulted. And we forget, we are not the people of promise related to all of the promises really laid out in God's Word. Those happen to Israel, not to us. You're probably wondering, pastor Paul, why are you harping on these things? Paul wrote this, the other Paul. I'm just sharing. Can we go back to the list?

- separated
- alienated
- strangers
- having no hope
- Without God

We are not only separated, we're alienated from God. Alienated. He actually wrote here, "*alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.*" Don't let the word commonwealth throw you off. He's basically saying, we're not part of God's chosen nation. We're not, we're alienated. So we're not only not part of a..., we're alienated from God's chosen people. And that means we have nothing in common, to start off with, with Israel. Because we didn't belong, we don't belong to their nation.

Next he says, we're strangers to the covenants of promise. God made wonderful covenants with Israel, but not with us. He made wonderful promises to Israel, but not to you and me. And we were strangers to all these things.

Next he says, "*having no hope*" is the next description of Gentiles. Having no..., wow, how bleak can you get? "...*having no hope...*" That's us Gentiles.

This is something Paul wanted you and I to think about. He wanted us to understand that apart from Christ, we had no hope because we were disconnected from everything God was doing on the face of the earth through Israel. We weren't part of that country, we weren't part of those people. No hope. No hope in our lives.

And then finally, he says, related to us as Gentiles, we're "*without God.*" Think about that term for a while, "*without God.*" By the way, those 2 words, "*without God,*" are the English translation of a single Greek word, *Atheos*, which is where we get our word, atheist. Which by the way, is also translated godless. Godless, pretty much describes our secular culture, does it not?

Godless, it's godless, it's atheistic. Isn't it interesting too we were praying on Thursday and one of the guys was praying about the world in which we live and he was describing it as a militant atheism and I thought, wow, that really hit me. I mean, we used to live back in the Mayberry days, we were kind of living in a polite secular society, I suppose. Now it's a militant atheistic society. Welcome to 2018. But it's godless, but you know what, that description of the culture today, is a description of Gentiles, apart from Christ, godless.

Okay, if I haven't thoroughly depressed you down to your core, let's get into verse 13. Because this is where we start off with that wonderful word that we've talked about before, and that's the word, but. And that word, but, again, alerts us to the fact that the writer wants to make a contrast. He's going to contrast this dark picture that he's been painting related to our Gentile status with now who and what we are in Christ Jesus today. And by the way, that will continue on through the rest of the chapter, which we'll deal with next week. But notice he

says here in verse 13, “*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off* (that's a summation of everything he's been saying so far about us, we) *have* (now) *been brought near...*”

And I know that we're not spending nearly as much time talking about the positive side of things, but I want to emphasize for just a moment that term, “*brought near.*” We were once far off. We were alienated. We were separated. We were without hope. We were without life. We were without promise. We were without glory. We were without understanding.

But now! In Christ Jesus, we've been, “*brought near.*” Notice it doesn't say we recognized our situation and said, hey, I want some of that and started running off looking for God. No, no, no, no.

The emphasis is on what He did, He brought us near. We didn't want anything to do with Him, but He brought us near.

Remember what Jesus said, no one comes to me, except that the Father draws him, right? There has to be a drawing work in our lives for us to even open our heart and say, I think I'd like to know more about this God. He begins that process and brings us near.

And then when we respond with faith, right? And I say to the Lord, oh, you've made me very aware, painfully aware, Lord, that my sin stands between you and I. And you've also made me aware of the fact that you sent your Son to absorb the penalty of that sin in His work on the cross, and I accept that. I accept that's what you did for me, and I receive the forgiveness that comes with that acceptance, and I put my faith in you.

When that happens, when we go through that process with the Lord, there is an incredible thing that takes place where this chasm that once existed between you and God is just eliminated. The separation that was there before now has been bridged, the alienated status that you had with God and His people has been absolved, and you are no longer estranged from Him. And you are brought near. And the blessings that we described earlier about Israel are now yours. But it doesn't mean you're a Jew. We'll talk about this next week. We'll talk about what you are now.

Because even the Jews who are in Christ are no longer Jews in the technical sense of the term. They can call themselves a messianic Christian if they want to. But they're just simply part of the bride of Christ, just as you are. And we're going to talk next week, how Jew and Gentile has really been abolished. And all

the divisions, and all of the stigma, and all of the separation that went along with those titles, or those divisions has now been just taken out of the way through Jesus Christ. We'll deal with that next week.

But the point that we're making today is that His incredible love and mercy has reached out to you and I, not leaving us in our hopeless condition and situation, but He has brought us near, brought us near into His very heart. Into the most personal, intimate relationship that you can imagine.

I mean we were cut off. We were nothing and He brought us near. Notice what he says in verse 13. Again, look with me as I read that verse, *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near..."* How? How? What does it say? It says, *"...by the blood of Christ."* Sin separated us from God, His blood got rid of that separation.

Remember, people, whenever we talk about the blood of Christ, we're talking about the life of Christ, okay? Literally, you could put the word, life in there, and it would work.

Because even in the Old Testament, where we're told that the life of an animal or a human is in the blood, you drain the blood, you got no more life. So when the Bible talks about the fact that through the blood of Jesus, you and I have been brought near to God, He's talking about through His life poured out for you. He literally poured out His life in order to bring you near.

So why are we going through all this? Why have I taken 3 simple verses here from Ephesians chapter 2 and emphasize them for an entire message here this morning? Well, it's very simple, because way back in verse 11, way back, in verse 11 look with me again.

You'll notice that the very first, the 2 first words of that verse are, *"Therefore, remember."* This is something we hear quite a bit in the Word of God, exhorting you and I to remember. And I think we probably hear it a lot, because it's a constant threat that we're not going to remember. I mean, we do constantly need to be reminded of the things of the Lord, don't we?

And the word, remember is one of those communion type words because it's what Jesus told us to do as often as we had the cup and the bread, He says, as often as you come together to do this, do this how? In remembrance, because that act of just saying, why am I doing this again? What is this all about? What is this for? What has taken place? We need that. We need that refreshing because we're so geared to our daily lives, you and I, and what we're doing. And

our businesses, going to school, or family, and all the drama that goes along with all those things. And how are we going to pay our bills, and this and that, and we're just going..., and it's just dizzying. Right?

And in the midst of all of that, it's very easy for you and I to forget. And so He says, now remember, therefore remember, remember.

What He wants us to remember here is our status as Gentiles. He wants us to know just exactly how out of the loop we were and how hopeless we were and He wants you to also remember what God did to rectify all of that. And that's what we do through communion, right?