

“Reflecting on the Riches of God’s Redemptive Work” Part 1, Sermon Notes: Ephesians

2:11-22

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“Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision " by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹² *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded 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 formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. ¹⁷ AND 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 our access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:11-22 NAU)

Introduction

- Hard for me to leave the first 10 verses of this chapter
- Great themes of God’s work in Salvation
- Rescued us from darkness, made us alive, raised us up, seated us with Christ, demonstrated His glory, gave us grace and faith, produces good works within us
- These works are so wonderful and rich that it makes it hard to leave
- **The glory of God demonstrated in the gospel shines forth from these last 10 verses**

**** As I have shown you before, Paul’s intention is to explain God’s work in salvation. He desires that we who have faith in Christ, we who are believers, would come to understand the greatness of God’s Work for us**

- We are built up and protected by God when we focus on Him
- Our focus on God and His work is what helps us endure difficulties and trials
- Paul knew this and this is why he prayed for the Ephesians:

*“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might” (Ephesians 1:18-19 NAU)*

- Prays for knowledge
- Prays for understanding
- Prays insight into God’s great work

**** Now to my joy, Paul takes us deeper into the work of God in verses 11-22**

Paul begins verse 11 with what grammarians call an **inferential conjunction**.

- Dio
- Can be translated as “Therefore” or “wherefore”
- It is a strong connection which usually follows a statement in order to make an application of the statement
- It is used to give a deduction, conclusion, or summary of the preceding discussion

What Paul is doing here is taking us into a greater look at the themes he has been addressing about God’s work in Salvation.

It is like he is opening a door into another room of the same house to show us greater truths. In this, Paul is going to take us deeper into the study of salvation and God’s work of redeeming His people.

- Remember we were dead in our transgressions and sins. We were enemies. We were by nature children destined for wrath
- But God demonstrated His great kindness towards us
- God made us alive, raised us up with Him, seated us with Christ
- God demonstrates His greatness in us now and into eternity
- God gave us grace and faith along with regeneration, justification, union with Christ, and the hope of future glorification
- He also works to make sure that salvation is evidently His work
- Vs 9 Not the result of works lest any man should boast
- We are His workmanship

**** Now with the inferential conjunction here Paul is going to take us on a journey to think deeper about what he has just stated.**

He says to his readers “Remember”

“Therefore remember” vs 11

The verb here is the main verb of this section and is a command.

Present Active Imperative

Present Tense- now and ongoing action. Action that never stops.

Active Voice– Subject does the action of the verb. Subject is his readers. 2 person pl “you”

Imperative Mood – command

Here Paul is commanding us to regularly remember the truths we are about to cover in these next 11 verses. These things are the natural conclusion of what Paul has demonstrated in the first 10 verses of this chapter.

As we look at this next section we must be asking ourselves two questions:

1. Why would Paul command his audience to remember what he is about to say?

- This goes back to his prayer in chapter 1:18-19
- What we are going to learn here is going to help us see the greatness of the riches of God’s work in salvation
- Which means when we think about our salvation we must think in terms of what Paul brings up here.
- Remembering what God has done for us in salvation will keep us from riding the personal and emotional rollercoaster that comes when we place our trust in fallen humanity
- When we trust in ourselves or other people we constantly see failure BUT when we trust in God we never experience letdown because God is always faithful

2. And how do the things Paul is about to say relate to what has just been stated?

- Paul has just talked about the work of God in salvation
- He started it in chapter 1
- He affirmed they were believers in 1:15
- **What Paul is going to do in these next 11 verses is give a summary proof that God is at work in their salvation**
- How? **By doing what only God can do, which is bring true unity**

- Unity Among Jews and Gentiles and unity between God and man

Why does Paul command us to remember the work of God in salvation?

- Maybe it is because man is tempted to think he is in control of everything
- Maybe God wants to show us how hopeless we are
- Maybe it is because part of the consequence of a man-centered gospel is a belief that we did not really need much of God's help
- Or maybe it is because a high view of God's work is what is needed to make us dependent on Him.
- Whatever the case is, I know this for certain: a healthy church will listen to and obey the commands given to it by an Apostle. If Paul here is commanding us to give careful attention to what he is about to say and to remember it, then indeed we must do it. And we will. *We must also understand the things he is about to share with us have a context rooted in the gospel and they will enrich our understanding of God's work.*

Paul takes us further to break down any and all self-reliance.

**** Paul gives us 5 truths we must remember to enhance our appreciation of God's work in our salvation, which will increase our hopeful expectation of eternal life and which will magnify the riches of God's glory.**

I will give you these truths each week as we cover these verses.

1. **Our nationality leaves us without hope vs. 11-12**

Remember the dual-edged purpose of these truths Paul presents in verses 11-22

1. To enhance our appreciation of God's work
2. To understand the glory of the riches God has given us

"Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision " by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹² *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Ephesians 2:11-12 NAU)

Explanation:

Paul starts here by taking his Gentile audience back. Back in time before the truths found in verses 1-10

He takes them back to the time before they were saved.

"Formerly you"

He is saying now presently remember your former condition.

It is like saying, "Don't forget where your home is. Don't forget where you come from. Don't forget who you are."

One of the great treasures God gives us is the ability to forget painful events. It is both a blessing and a cursing. A wound healed isn't often a wound remembered. We could have a humble upbringing and completely forget where we came from.

Here Paul is reminding his readers to not forget their history.

“. . . formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh”

- He is now calling the Gentiles to pay attention
- That most likely would be a majority of his readers
- Clearly it refers to all of us
- He is addressing you and me and reminding us that we were formerly Gentiles in the flesh

“. . . who are called "Uncircumcision " by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands”

- To drive home the point, Paul says we are called the uncircumcision
- We are those who do not have the mark of the Jewish men upon their bodies
- We are those who are apart from God
- Paul is making a point to refer to the physical separation between Jew and Gentile
- The Jews gloried in the physical act of circumcision, and that is why Paul emphasizes the “performed in the flesh by human hands.”
- He is making a clear reference to the work of men here, not the work of God
- We understand that when God looks to true circumcision He is looking to a removal of a dead heart.

Lev 26:41 “I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies--or if their **uncircumcised heart** becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity,” (Leviticus 26:41 NAU)

Deut 10:16 "**So circumcise your heart**, and stiffen your neck no longer.” (Deuteronomy 10:16 NAU)

Jer 4:4 "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove **the foreskins of your heart**, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds." (Jeremiah 4:4 NAU)

Eze 44:7 when you brought in foreigners, **uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh**, to be in My sanctuary to profane it, *even* My house, when you offered My food, the fat and the blood; for they made My covenant void-- *this* in addition to all your abominations.” (Ezekiel 44:7 NAU)

- God’s work is a work of a transformation of the heart
- So here Paul is making direct reference to our relationship to the nation of Israel and he is pointing out that we are not a part of it.

The Jews took pride in their sign of the covenant

Phil 3:5 Paul’s honor

“circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;” (Philippians 3:5 NAU)

Gal 6:12-13; 5:2-6; Phil 2:2-3

“Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they **may boast in your flesh**.” (Galatians 6:12-13 NAU)

**** Truth # 1 – We did not deserve salvation because we were not a part of God’s people. Therefore God had to do a great work to be able to bring us in and make us a part of His people.**

Apart from God’s help, we were without hope because God had never made a promise to us.

To say there was animosity between the Jews and Gentiles would be an understatement. As you read through the OT and into the NT, you see a lot of bitterness between the Jews and Gentiles.

- The Bible does very little to hide the Jewish prejudice
- History does very little to hide the Gentile prejudice

MacArthur points out in His commentary

“The Greeks were so proud of their culture and supposed racial superiority that they considered everyone else to be barbarians, a belief to which Paul alludes on Rom 1:14 and Col 3:11. The Greek language was considered to be the language of the gods. The Roman statesman Cicero wrote, “As the Greeks say, ‘All men are divided into two classes, Greeks and Barbarians.’” Livy, another ancient Roman, wrote that Greeks constantly waged a truceless war against people of other races, all of whom they held to be barbarians. Because of these feelings, the early church faced continuing barriers not only between believing Gentiles and Jews but between believing Greeks and other Gentile believers.”

Why did the Jews resist the Gentiles so much?

1. **Because of the corrupting influence of the Gentile nations –**

- Remember God set Israel apart from the surrounding nations
- He gave them civil and ceremonial laws to make them distinct from the surrounding nations
- Yet there was a constant attraction to these nations
- Jews marrying Gentiles, being corrupted by their practices and their deities
- There could be animosity because of how influential these nations were to lead God's people into sin
- Just think about the corrupting influence of Babylon when it took captives. Only Daniel and his three friends stood up and did not defile themselves.

2. **Because of the harbored bitterness over past wrongs –** treated as slaves, Egypt. The Jews were often seen as enemies to be killed. And it is hard to love and respect when you think someone is about to kill you.

There is a story of Jewish midwives who would not help gentile women deliver babies because they did not want to be responsible for bringing another despised Gentile into this world.

4th Chapter of the Book of Jonah

"But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my *own* country? **Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.**" ³ "**Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.**" ⁴ The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" ⁵ Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city. ⁶ So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. ⁷ But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. ⁸ "**When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with *all* his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life."**" ⁹ Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death." ¹⁰ "**Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and *which* you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.**" ¹¹ "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (Jonah 4:1-11 NAU)

- God wanted to show compassion upon Nineveh but Jonah did not

- God was willing to show compassion because of the little children, but Jonah was not
- Jonah's attitude towards Nineveh is a good reflection of the Jewish attitude towards the Gentile nations

3. Because of the unholy conduct among the Gentiles

Gentiles constantly violated the law of God. They did not appreciate it and they did not desire to come under it. They worshipped false gods and they would practice evil. Therefore it was common for the Jews to distance themselves from the Gentiles around them.

This attitude of the Jews towards the Gentiles was evidenced in the Apostle Peter. Before Paul came on the scene as a major influence among the apostles, Peter was taught by God:

Acts 10:9-16

"On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. ¹⁰ But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; ¹¹ and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, ¹² and there were in it all *kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.* ¹³ A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." ¹⁵ Again a voice *came* to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no *longer* consider unholy." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky." (Acts 10:9-16 NAU)

Vs 28

"And he said to them, "**You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him**; and *yet* God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean." (Acts 10:28 NAU)

** The point is that the Jews would not associate with Gentiles and we are Gentiles. We were held out and there was no way they were going to let us become a part

Gal 2:11-14

"But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. ¹³ The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Galatians 2:11-14 NAU)

“remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (Ephesians 2:12 NAU)

This verse gives us 5 more characteristics which evidenced our hopeless state.

The Gentiles were also:

1. **Without Christ** – No national hope of a messiah. The Jews had such a hope Rom 9:4-5. So this either means no Savior or no hope of a Messiah.

“who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, ⁵ whose are the fathers, and **from whom is the Christ** according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.” (Romans 9:4-5 NAU)

The Jews had the hope that the Messiah was going to come through them.

Jesus was born a Jew and came into this world as a man under the law.

2. **Outside of the commonwealth of Israel** – excluded or alienated.

Best idea of this is that we as Gentiles were outside of the citizenship of Israel. We might be able to live in their city and be a part of their traditions, but we are not a citizen.

We lacked the citizenship, therefore we lacked all of the privileges owed to the citizens.

3. **Strangers to the covenants and promises**

The covenants were not made with the Gentiles but with the Jews.

The promises of blessings, a land, of peace, of restoration

The covenants were all made with Israel and we as Gentiles were without hope

We did not have the hope of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, The Davidic Covenant, nor the hope of the New Covenant

These were all made with Israel and apart from Christ we had no hope in any of them because God did not make a covenant with us at all but with the Jew only.

4. **Having no hope**

As a result, we are hopeless. There is nothing we could rely on. We are guilty and God had no reason to show us any grace. We had nothing to leverage God with. We had nothing to tempt God with.

5. **Without God in the world**

The word here translated as without God is the word we get atheist from. It means without God or against God.

We are without God's presence and we are against God

Best meaning here is that we were without God

Apart from God's work we are utterly hopeless.

Even if I wanted to be saved, I could not because I lacked the nationality

1. Without Christ
2. Outside the common wealth of Israel
3. Strangers to the Covenants and promises
4. Having no hope
5. Without God in the world

Implications for Salvation

We have to appreciate what God has done for us because we did not choose our race. We did not choose our nationality

- Let's assume for a moment that we are saved because we have chosen to come to God.
- Like some who believe that God has paved the whole way for salvation and now it is up to us to finish the work by taking hold of the salvation God offers.
- Those who take this view would say salvation is of God we just need to take hold of it. We need to believe or we need to accept the gift given to us.
- They would emphasize that it is up to us to accept or reject the gift that God has offered to us
- The problem is that while this theological idea may sound reasonable it is by no means found here in Ephesians two. Maybe it might be somewhere else but it clearly is not found here
- We were dead and he had to save us
- He has given us grace and faith
- This is not a part of our works lest we could boast
- We are the product of His handiwork
- Now here in verse 11 we are told that we are naturally separated from God's people.

Let's assume we must come to God on our own to be saved:

- Even if that is true we still must remember that unless God works first, we have no hope of salvation!
- He had to rescue us
- He had to break down the dividing walls
- He had to offer us hope

Even if your theology leads you to believe you embraced God to be saved, you must remember this: unless God has worked first, there is nothing for you to reach out and embrace!

Conclusion

Remember the dual-edged purpose of these truths Paul presents in verses 11-22

1. To enhance our appreciation of God's work
2. To understand the glory of the riches God has given us

We should be thankful to God for salvation because all of our will cannot resolve our hopeless condition.

1. Dead in our sins
2. Enemies of God
3. Children of wrath
4. Unable to work off our debts
5. Without Christ
6. Outside the commonwealth of Israel
7. Strangers to the covenants and promises
8. Having no hope
9. Without God in the world

But God was merciful and kind and showed His willingness to save.

Next week we will see how God was able to restore us.

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