



Ephesians

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Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— Ephesians 2:11

Paul gathers up the lesson of the previous verses into a summary thought with the word “therefore.” He is asking the Ephesians to reflect on what he has said and to consider their new status and position in Christ. Early in chapter 1, he said this to them –

“...that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. ¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

¹³ In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:10-14

He said in those verses that God had gathered together “all things in Christ.” He explained this as those things “both which are heaven and which are on earth.” He then noted that even they, the Ephesian Gentiles, had believed and they “were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

Now, in order to show the magnitude of what this means to them in particular, he asks them to “remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh,” were now to be considered in a different light. They were without Christ, and they were not included in the overall redemptive plans of God concerning the nation of Israel. Circumcision was Israel’s mark of inclusion into this body,

and it was that which marked them out as separate from the rest of the people groups of the world.

At that time, they were “called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision. In this, he uses the abstract for the concrete – “Uncircumcision” for “uncircumcised,” and “Circumcision” for “circumcised.” However, he adds in a note of irony. It was the Circumcision who “called” the uncircumcised the “Uncircumcision.” It was a note of contempt. They looked down on those who were not a part of them as a cruel master might look down upon his dirty slave. The irony is that Paul gives back the term “called” to the Circumcision. In other words, “They are the ‘so-called’ Circumcision, but that term is now just as derogatory as ‘Uncircumcision’ once was.”

The reason for this is that it was “made in the flesh by hands.” He will explain the irony in the verses ahead, demonstrating that the external sign no longer meant anything at all. It is a thought which is comparable to many other verses in his letters, such as Romans 2:25 & 4:12; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:6 & 6:15; and Colossians 3:11. As far as the references in Galatians, they simply explain the thought which permeates most of the epistle.

Paul’s words are so clear and concise concerning this issue, that it is more than a wonder how people can still find some type of elevated distinction in being circumcised in the flesh, but it happens every day. If one is “in Christ,” then circumcision of the flesh is nullified as a marker of distinction.

Life application: Where is your hope? Is it in a mark of the flesh? If so, then Christ’s marks of the cross mean nothing to you. Is it in an observance of the law such as not eating pork? Then Christ’s fulfillment of the law means nothing to you. His words, “It is finished” are abrogated by your futile attempt to do what He has already done. Trust in Christ, rest in Christ, and be reconciled to God through Christ. Put your useless deeds of the flesh away!

...that at that time you 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.
Ephesians 2:12

In one verse, Paul defines five conditions with which those outside of Israel were in. If considered in their proper light, the ramifications are terrifying. All people on earth, with the exception of those who were in a particular group were “without Christ.” As God is infinite and holy, and as man is finite and fallen, there is an infinite gap between the two. There is no possible way to bridge that gap apart from Christ. “Without Christ” then means “without access to God.” There was only birth into the stream of humanity apart from God, life of woe leading to death, life ending at death, and a continued and eternal separation from the Creator. Without Christ, there was (and still is) no hope. It is not that Christ was just not

present with them, as if they could call out to Him and be reconciled to Him. Instead, they were without Him in the fullest sense; they had no part in Him.

He next notes that they were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.” The word in Greek is a verb, not a noun. It reads “being alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.” They were out, and they were kept out by the state they were in. With few recorded exceptions, this was the state of all people on the planet. They were born, lived, and died apart from the access to God which was provided through Christ to all who were of Israel’s commonwealth.

The importance of “being alienated” rather than “being aliens” is understood in the promise to Abraham that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” through him. The alienation came from the fall; the commonwealth of Israel is a restoration of that. Until Christ came, this was the default position for all people outside of Israel. It should be noted that this is a spiritual, not a national commonwealth. Paul explains this in Romans 9:6 stating that “they are not all Israel who *are* of Israel.”

For those who lived by faith in the hope of Christ, they were set apart within this spiritual commonwealth, enjoying the benefits that are derived from it. As a side note concerning this, if we are brought into the commonwealth of Israel through Christ, then it shows that we are not Israel. The church has not replaced Israel, but is brought into a right relationship with God through this spiritual commonwealth. Israel is Israel; the church is the church.

To further highlight the plight, he moves on to “strangers from the covenants of promise.” The Greek reads “the promise.” Further, the word “covenants” is plural and the word “promise” is singular. A promise was made right after the fall that restoration would be made and that man would be brought back into a right relationship with God. After that time, a series of covenants was made in order for this to come about based on that one promise. This is reflected in the words of Hebrews 1:1 –

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets...”

The Gentiles were not a part of these covenants, and yet they were a part of the promise. Until Christ came, they had no hope in the world and were cut off from what Christ was doing through these covenants.

Paul then notes that the state of these people was, “having no hope.” They may have had thoughts about eternity, and indeed they wrote and spoke about such things, just as non-believers do today. However, these were and are merely speculations and fanciful wishes which are not based in reality. The word “hope” here doesn’t mean “an expectation of.” Today Muslims who blow themselves up in the name of their false god have “an expectation of” paradise, but it is not one based in God’s reality. The “hope” Paul refers to is “a certainty of

that which is offered by the one true God through Christ.” The Gentiles were in this terrible state and were “condemned already” according to Jesus’ words of John 3:18.

Finally, Paul notes that they were “without God in the world.” They had God in the general sense of receiving His goodness in rains, sunny days, blue skies, and etc. These things reveal God and make us aware of His nature, but what Paul is referring to is the connection to Him which comes through Christ. Christ the Mediator is what allows us to be “with” God in the fullest sense; to be “children of God” through adoption; and to have the eternal inheritance that He offers through Christ.

Through Him, these five terrifying states of existence are obliterated. We now have full access because of what He has done. And yet, today, people voluntarily exist in the state that at one time they had no choice in participating in. God has offered the restoration of all things to us if we will simply receive them by faith. And yet, we as humans will do anything to set aside this grace and establish our own reconnection to God; something which is impossible.

Life application: In Christ, we who were once far off are now brought near to God. Let us never forget the magnitude of what He has done for us.