

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Ephesians - it's all about Christ: Brought near to Him - Ephesians 2:11-22

Today we continue our study of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians and our passage is from Ephesians 2:11-22. In the previous talks we have looked at the earlier verses in the epistle under the headings of "Chosen in Him", "Learning of Him" and "Seated in Him". Today the heading for our talk is "Brought near to Him".

In my *Schofield Study Bible* Ephesians 2:11-22 are split into three sections under the following headings:

- Ephesians 2:11-13 "The Gentile position by nature";
- Ephesians 2:14-18 "Jew and Gentile one body in Christ"; and
- Ephesians 2:19-22 "The church, a temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit".

As we have such a short passage to consider I want to read the verses to you, I will read the verses in these three smaller sections and will do so from the King James Version which as many of you will know is 400 years old this year.

Ephesians 2:11-13 The Gentile position by nature

"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; 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: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ". (Ephesians 2:11-13)

At the very start of our passage today the Apostle Paul reminds these believers once again of their natural position as Gentiles. He speaks as to their "condition" at the start of the chapter - "dead in trespasses and sins", (Ephesians 2:1) and now he reminds them of their "position" as Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11). Today we might say that there are only three groups of people in the world: the Jew, the Gentile and the Church of God. We will see later that the third group is made up of both Jew and Gentile and this is truly a wonderful thing, which only the death of Christ could make possible. First let us consider for a moment the Jew, spoken of in Ephesians 2:11-13 as the circumcision and the commonwealth of Israel. God's chosen people, loved by a sovereign God above all the other nations of the earth. In Deuteronomy 7:6-8 we read "the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you".

No other nation is as favoured as Israel and everything God has promised to them will come to pass in His time. Even today the Jew has a special place in God's heart. However the wonderful privileges they had committed to them through the fathers and the prophets, including the Old Testament scriptures, only served to condemn them and made them more responsible for their refusal of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Messiah. In John 1:11 we read that "He [that is Jesus Christ] came to that which was "His own" [the world - creatorially] and "His own" [the Jews - sovereignly] received Him not." It is because of their refusal of Him, as the Messiah, that God's salvation has come to the Gentiles, the non-Jew. It is a measure of the grace of God that the Apostle Paul who was himself of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, Philippians 3:5, was given the responsibility to take this message of salvation to the Gentiles. It is essential that we bear this in mind as we read this epistle, that these verses were written primarily to Gentiles. Our position then is rightly summed up in Ephesians 2:13 as being "afar off" - Gentiles by birth, uncircumcised and without Christ, strangers from the commonwealth of Israel having no hope, and without God in the world. Pretty bleak it must be said! Well, that's the black background on which the light of the following verses shines brightly upon. We do well to realise that being born in a nominally Christian country, christened in church or even taking communion are not the means of bringing us near to God. The old chorus says:

*"There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin,
There's a door that is open and you may go in,
At Calvary's cross is where you begin,
When you come as a sinner to Jesus".*

EH Swinsted (1976)

And this is the message of the Gospel, the good news which God wants all mankind to hear. That there is a way to be brought near to Him, and that way is open for each person, irrespective of who they are. The salvation which God has made available to all by the work of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross is the only way we can be brought near to Him. I am concerned as I increasingly hear the message of universal salvation being preached that people will be confused as to what the gospel of God really is. Those who preach a universal salvation say that because God is Love, and Jesus died for all, then everyone will be blessed and have a place in heaven. If you listen carefully at many funeral or memorial services, you will often hear this message given. This is not what the Bible teaches. It is not the Gospel which came by Jesus Christ and was preached so powerfully by the apostles in the days following Christ's ascension and which has brought so many into blessing up to this present day. Let us be quite clear in what the Bible says and continue to "preach that word" while refuting the present ideas of men. Yes, God is Love but He also is Light. Yes, Jesus died for all, and therefore salvation is available to all, but we have to individually put our faith and trust in Him to have our sins forgiven.

Do you have that assurance that your sins are forgiven? Do you enjoy the blessing of having peace with God and is your hope of heaven "steadfast and sure"? Only if we show repentance towards God and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can we have our sins forgiven, peace with God and hope for heaven.

What a wonderful verse, Ephesians 2:13 is! One of the wonderful "buts" in this epistle, "But now in Christ Jesus [and you will notice it is Christ Jesus, the risen, ascended heavenly Man] ye who were sometimes afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Dear Christian friend does that not fill you with joy? What a transformation, so far off - now made nigh!

As I read these verses, my thoughts always go to the story in Luke 15:11-32 of the younger son. I'm sure many of you know this story well but if not then read through Luke 15:11-32. I believe that the chapter is one parable in three parts and shows us the three Persons of the Godhead, active in the blessing of mankind. We see a wonderful picture of the "**willingness of the Son**" in the shepherd who went after the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7). In the woman searching for the coin we see an illustration of the "**work of the Holy Spirit**" searching for the lost (Luke 15:8-10), and in the story of the lost son we see the wonderful "**welcome of the Father**" (Luke 15:11-32) and there is joy in the presence of the angels of God. The joy is God's!

Think of that young man in the far country, lost to the joy of his father's house. See him destitute and hungry, so hungry that he wished for the food the pigs were eating. Perhaps he had to be brought to this low point in his life before he "came to himself" (Luke 15:17). When he did, he remembered his father's house and the fact that even the servants did not go hungry there (Luke 15:17) He made up his mind to return, "I will go back to my father" he said (Luke 15:18) and more than this, his actions backed up his thoughts and words (Luke 15:18-19). I love the fact that we hear him rehearse his lines which he would say to his father when they met, although the father didn't let him complete them all (Luke 15:21-22). Have you noticed that before? His hope was that he could become like a servant in the employ of his father, but oh, how he misjudged the heart of the father! When he was yet a great way off his father ran to meet him.

Picture him in that loving embrace, covered in kisses and listen to the overtures of grace and love that flow from the father's joyful heart. "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it and let us eat and be merry." (Luke 15:22-24)

Mercy may well have given him a servant's place but Grace brought him into the place of "a son". What a wonderful picture of the heart of God as He blesses us not according to our needs but according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). What a transformation, from the far country to the father's house and all the honour and privileges of sonship. Do we have any comprehension of just how much God has blessed us in Christ Jesus? The hymn writer had a sense of this when he wrote:

*"By nature and by practice far,
How very far from God!
Yet now by grace brought nigh to Him,
Through faith in Jesus' blood.*

*So nigh, so very nigh to God,
I cannot nearer be;
For in the person of His Son,
I am as near as He".*

Catesby Paget (1804-1878)

There would be something wrong if thoughts like these did not move our spirits in worship and adoration to God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Well may we return to the language of the first chapter and exclaim, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"!

Ephesians 2:14-18 Jew and Gentile one body in Christ

Reading on in the passage we read Ephesians 2:14-18: "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; 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; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. for through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father".

What a wonderful five verses, bringing before us the fact that now in Christ Jesus both Jewish and Gentile believers are "one new man". All natural and religious prejudices and enmity are gone and reconciled unto God. The Israelites had access to God under the old order of things, and as Paul wrote this letter there would have still been Jews "worshipping" in the temple at Jerusalem. We will note the contrast with the "holy" temple which the Apostle speaks about, at the end of our study together.

When the Lord Jesus died (or more accurately gave up His life) we read that the veil of the temple was torn - torn in twain from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51). The symbolism was that the temple way of approaching God was over - finished. I know that we sometimes think of the torn veil as the way being opened for us to approach God, but I rather prefer to think of the torn veil as a demonstration to us of the emptiness of what the temple worship had become. God was not interested in man's ritualistic, self centred, ceremonial "worship". He was demonstrating that He was coming out of that sphere and making His habitation through the Spirit in the Christian Church, which was to be formed at Pentecost. It is of great importance to see this that the Christian church is an entirely new entity and not a continuation of Israel in any way, shape or form.

And so we read that He is our peace. The Lord Jesus is our peace! What does it mean? Ephesians 2:16 tells us that both (that is Jew and Gentile) have been reconciled not to each other as such, but unto God. Not only did enmity exist between Jew and Gentile but what about the enmity between mankind and God. Only the work of the cross could bring peace. Again the words of a hymn come to mind;

*"Yes peace! Since every claim is met,
Lord Jesus by Thy blood,
And Thou 'our peace' art risen and set
On high by God".*

H D'A Champney (1854-1942)

Earlier we spoke about the three groups of people in the world today: the Jew, the Gentile and the church of God. Here is the wonder of what could never have been achieved by negotiation, compromise or peace talks. When a Jew accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her personal Saviour they become part of the church. Likewise when a Gentile accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her personal Saviour they too become part of the church. So we see that in being reconciled to God they are indeed one new man and there is no enmity between them, only peace. I like to think of believers being joined individually to Christ, just like the spokes on a bicycle wheel, with Christ at the centre (the hub). They are also joined together, through Him, and it is true that the closer we are to Christ (the hub) the closer we will be to our fellow believers. Perhaps we should pause and challenge our hearts in this, remembering our Lord's own words "by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). So what a wonderful peace we have now in Christ Jesus. We, Gentile believers, who were "afar off" and Jewish believers who were "nigh", and through Him we together have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Ephesians 2:18).

Now before we comment on Ephesians 2:19-22 let us pause and consider this wonderful access that we have. God has revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ told the woman of Samaria in John 4:23 that the Father was seeking worshippers. What a privilege then to be able to worship the Father, the One who is the source and spring of all blessing. What wonderful grace that by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we can have some appreciation of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20). As we meditate on these things our spirits would indeed rise and bless the Father. How He must delight to hear His blessed children sharing in the joy and pleasure which He finds in His beloved Son. Surely this is the "true worship" of which John 4:24 speaks. What a wonderful privilege too to be able to bring all our concerns and troubles to a loving Father who cares for us. Not like Israel in Old Testament days, limited access on certain days and at certain times but every moment of every day we have access by the Spirit unto the Father. There is nothing too big or too small to bring in prayer to Him. What a comfort the people of God can find in this assurance that His ear is always open to our prayers. Again the old chorus says:

*“Every moment of the day, my Father cares for me.
Every moment of the day, my heart from fear is free.
He who sees the sparrow fall, will hear my call.
Every moment of the day, He watches over me.”*

Harry Dixon Loes (1892-1965)

Ephesians 2:19-22 The church, a temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit

Now we complete our reading, Ephesians 2:19-22. “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit”.

I don't want to say too much about these verses as our time is almost up, but what beautiful picture is brought before us. In the days of Solomon's temple, (1 Kings 8) the stones were prepared off site and brought ready to be filled in to the temple building. What a magnificent structure it must have been! How fitting a building for the house of God. In our day the house of God is the church - what a weighty consideration this is for us. The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy with instruction as to his conduct in the house of God which is the church of the living God, 1 Timothy 3:15. The house ought to be characterised by the One who lives there, and so it should be in the church. God's thoughts, not ours should be displayed in our gatherings together and if this is so there will be blessing amongst God's people and a powerful witness to the world. How sad it is when we come to Revelation 3, in the letter to the church of Laodicea, it appears that the Lord Jesus is knocking on the outside of the door (Revelation 3:20). No place for Him in a church which bears His name! Let us be overcomers in our day and enjoy the communion of His blessed presence whilst we wait for His return.

May God bless you all.

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