

EPHESIANS 2:11-13

INTRODUCTION

In the run up to Christmas I get bombarded with literature asking me or us as a church to make a donation to various worthy causes. I have received a number of letters from charities working with homeless people this year whether it is shelter or crisis or some other worthy charity. I have noticed in their publicity that one word has been used quite frequently. The word is alienation. A homeless person can be alienated from their family and from society and so on.

I'm sure that is right, homeless people must feel cut off and alienated from the rest of society which of course creates its own problem when trying to integrate them back into normal society. Well in this passage that we are looking at Paul who has already described the state of the sinner as one who is dead and needs to be made alive describes the sinner here as alienated from God and in need of reconciliation. Now in telling the church at Ephesus about their alienation from God he wants them to:

1. REMEMBER THEIR PAST (vs. 11-12)

If you notice that word 'remember' appears twice once in verse 11 and once in verse 12. So it is clear that Paul's purpose and the purpose of the Holy Spirit in telling us these things is so that we will remember our past. We are to sit down and reflect upon our past. Have you ever wondered what might have happened if the Lord had not of saved us. Where would you be today if he had not of stepped into your life by his sovereign grace? Where would we be living, who would we be married to, what jobs might we be doing, what sort of company would be keeping?

What sort of person would we be what would our character be like, what would we think of life and death and eternity? I know this is all speculation but there is no speculation about Paul's description of our spiritual state. We would still be dead in our sins and we would still be following the world, the flesh and the devil but now Paul tells us we would also be alienated or separated from God.

Now to understand verse 11 we must remember that most of Paul's readers were Gentiles. The Jews looked down on Gentiles they called them Gentile dogs and the Jews always spoke of the Gentiles with a sneer while speaking of themselves as Jews with great pride. They loved to call themselves the circumcised, they were God's covenant people they alone carried on their bodies the sign of the covenant they were the circumcised but the Gentiles are just dogs. Not only did they call Gentiles, dogs but they often referred to them as the uncircumcised meaning they are not God's privileged or chosen people, God does not deal with them like he deals with the nation of the circumcised. As far as the Jews were concerned these Ephesian Gentiles were beyond the pale they were unwelcome outsiders. Paul wants them to remember this for in doing so as it will magnify the marvellous grace of God in saving Gentiles like the Ephesians and indeed like us.

Paul however in passing reminds the Jews that circumcision is meaningless it is just something done by the hands of men unless there is a true circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:28-29). The circumcision that really matters to God is the circumcision of the heart the outward physical act was supposed to be symbolic of the inward spiritual operation of the heart.

In verse 12 Paul wants them to remember what being a Gentile meant in practice.

a) They were separated or alienated from Christ (v 12) – Because they were Gentiles they were separated from Christ. Now this of course could refer to the fact that they were not united to Christ because they have not come to faith in him, but this is probably not what is meant here for if this is what Paul meant then surely the same thing could be said about the Jew in his unregenerate state and remember Paul is highlighting the differences between Jew and Gentile. He is showing the

disadvantages of being a Gentile, the privileges that they did not have compared to the Jews. I think the clue to what Paul is talking about here is found in the word 'Christ,' which means 'Messiah.'

They were separate from the Messiah. I think Paul is writing in the same way he was in writing Romans 9:5 when he spoke of Jewish advantages and one of those advantages was that from the Jews is traced the human ancestry of Christ. This means that the Messiah came from the Jews and was perceived by the Jews. Now since these Ephesians were not Jews but Gentiles then they were cut off from this great advantage and in that sense they were separate from Christ.

The Gentiles had no expectation of a Saviour like the Jews had; their religion was totally pagan totally without Messianic expectation and hope.

Now we have to admit we too were just like these Ephesian Gentiles. We had no expectation of a Saviour, if we mentioned the name of Jesus it was without meaning or thought or else his name was on our lips as a swear word. We never thought about him and had no desire to seek him or to seek his salvation. The truth is we didn't even know we needed to be saved we thought we were fine going our own way. We were separate from Christ he was not a factor or a reality to us and we had no desire to have Him play any part in our lives until God intervened and changed all that. It's good to remember the disadvantages of being a Gentile pagan for in doing so it exalts the grace of God.

b) They were excluded from citizenship in Israel (v 12) – God had chosen Abraham and his descendants to be his people in this world before Christ came. He had made them into the nation of Israel and he had revealed himself to that nation. He treated Israel as his people, he gave them his word, he spoke at various times and in different ways to them (Hebrews 1:1) and they were to be light to the rest of the darken world.

But these Ephesian Gentiles were not part of that nation and we were not one of God's special people either, we were not privileged to have his revelation and his protection and his presence in the way that Israel had all those things. Jesus himself said that salvation came from the Jews (John 4:22). This statement was not a racial slur but a sober fact of salvation history. God had chosen to reveal his salvation through the Jews so that salvation came through the Jewish nation; this is why when people were saved in the Old Testament they became Jews.

Isn't this what happened to Ruth, Naomi's people became her people; her God became Ruth's God. This makes it even more remarkable that these Gentiles in Ephesus are now saved, they are saved in spite of their lack of privileges, and they are saved because of God's intervention through Christ, the Jewish Messiah.

c) They were foreigners to the covenants of the promise (v 12) – The Old Testament tells us how God made repeated covenants with Israel. These covenants were filled with promises. But since Paul uses the word promise in the singular here he is apparently thinking of the first and original promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). All the other promises of the Old Testament were on the basis of this covenant. But who were these promises for?

They were originally for those with whom the covenant was made. God's promises were addressed to the Israelite people, the Gentiles did not belong to God's privileged people and therefore generally speaking they did not even know that God had made promises, if they did know then they concluded that they were not for them for they were only for Israel.

Of course God did include the Gentiles in this original covenant but it was not understood in that way until the coming of Christ and the revealing of the true Israel in Christ. As far as the Gentiles were concerned they were outsiders they were not among God's covenant people.

d) They were without Hope (v 12) – the Jews had hope for they were expecting the Messiah. Their hope was real for the covenants overflowed with divine promises but the Gentiles did not share the hope of the Jews. They were without hope. Isn't this a dreadful way of describing anyone for without hope there is nothing. Even those homeless people that charities are trying to help are not without hope.

But in what ways were the Gentiles without hope apart from Christ. They were without hope chiefly in this life and in the life to come. In this life people without Christ come to realise that life is just temporary and also it is full of tinsel. It flatters to deceive. We may know that there is a God but despair of ever really knowing him in any sort of meaningful way. In this life we despair of things ever getting better.

Life has no real meaning without Christ, no real purpose and when we consider death it seems so final. No prospects of anything better beyond the grave, no hope of a bright eternal future. This was the plight of these Gentiles that was our plight until God intervened and rescued us and saved us and gave us life with meaning and purpose. The picture was bleak for these poor Gentiles and Paul emphasises just how bleak with his next statement.

e) They were without God in the world (v 12) – Before the coming of Christ and before God's intervention in the lives of these Gentiles and in our lives then we all were without God. We knew about him, our conscience might have told us there is a God. As we looked around at creation we may have been convinced there was a God, and even though we may not have thought much about it Scripture told us there was a God. But even though God was revealing Himself to us through these means we did not know Him.

We lived in this world without him and without any desire to know Him. He was not a reality to us, some of us perhaps thought that we would find that reality in various religions, or in false churches but we did not find him there. Some of us never even tried to find him we were convinced he did not exist and didn't even look for Him or for the reality He brings. We simply convinced ourselves there was no God we became atheists we were without hope and without God in our world.

We were alienated from the true God we did not know him as our Father; we did not enjoy his presence we simply were excluded from many of his blessings.

Paul is calling upon us all who are believers to remember our past, to think about what we once were to see how hopeless and helpless we were. We need to remember that we were separate or alienated from God but we were also separated from God's people and from the blessings of being one of his people. Now there are millions in our world today who are still like this. They have no hope outside of Christ; they went to bed last night without hope and rose again this morning without hope.

They might know about God but they do not know him as a living reality. They will live without him and they will die without Him unless God intervenes. What is true of millions of people today was once true of us. We were at enmity with God; we rebelled against the authority of God, and knew nothing of fellowship with God or with His people. Instead we built partitions between others and ourselves because we were alienated from God.

But God in Christ intervened in our miserable lives he made us alive and set us free from the bondage of sin and we are now a people with hope a people united to Christ. We are one of God's own precious chosen people, one who knows the blessings of the covenant that God made with Abraham a people with hope and with God in this world.

We must never forget our past we must ponder it we need to remember what we were like before God reached out to us and found us. The reason why we must never forget our past distasteful though it might be is that it enables us to remember the greatness of the grace of God, who forgave us and is transforming us into the image of Christ. Also remembering our past will keep us humble, it will remind us we have nothing to boast about, it will keep us day by day depending upon the grace of God and not upon ourselves.

It will also enhance our prayer life. If these statements are true of sinners today then the only hope for them is for God in Christ to come and awaken their dead souls and bring them into a relationship with God through Christ. Now of course that will not happen without people being told about Christ so evangelism is very important but evangelism will not save anyone unless God chooses to use it to intervene in a sinner's life and plant life into their dead hearts.

God does that in response to the prayers of His people. So what is the greatest need in the church today? It is the need to pray for God to come and save sinners. Yet doesn't it say something about the church of Jesus Christ today when we look at the size of our prayer meetings?

Doesn't it say something about us when we are so often unprepared to deny ourselves in order that we might pray for God to intervene in the lives of sinners? Therefore don't forget our past it will encourage us in evangelism but more importantly it will encourage us to pray.

2. WE MUST NOT FORGET CHRIST (v 13)

The situation for the Gentiles according to verses 11 and 12 is grim. But verses 13-22 tell us what these Ephesian Gentiles are now as a result of Christ. I don't have time to look at all these verses now so let us look at verse 13. This verse tells us what has happened to these Gentiles so that they are no longer strangers and alienated from God. Paul says that they and we have been brought near to God as a result of Christ's atonement for our sin.

In bringing the Gentiles near to God we will see next time that God is bringing together both Jews and Gentiles to form one new unity, the church of Jesus Christ.

Once these Ephesian Gentiles were far from God, they were separate from Christ with no expectation of a Messiah. They were not one of the nations of Israel, they did not know about the covenant promises they were without hope and without God but now they are described by Paul as being in Christ Jesus.

They are described as being brought near to God. What made this possible for these Gentiles and for us is the blood of Christ. His death on our behalf, as our substitute, taking upon himself God's wrath and giving to us his perfect righteousness.

Now because of Jesus we are united to Him and are therefore united to one another. Now we have hope, now we have God, now we are citizens of His kingdom now we have been brought near to God through Christ. O we must remember our past but as we do that it must lead us to remembering Christ, who gave his life so that we could be brought near to God.

This relationship that we now have with God is precious because it is costly. It costs Christ his life, he shed his blood so that we can know God and have a personal relationship with Him.

Do we take our relationship with him seriously? Do we appreciate what it means for us to be in relationship with the eternal God? Are we seeking to develop this relationship with God on a daily basis, for we are a privileged people we have come to know God we can now draw near to him and he to us? This is all possible because of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that was shed for sinners like us.

Let's spend some time now giving thanks to God for what he has done for us in Christ and let us ponder the privilege of being a child of God of being in the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally let us wonder at the grace of God in saving sinners like us.

Amen