

St Paul's Cathedral Melbourne
Bible Study
8 November 2020

Previous (Ephesians 2:1-10, NRSV)

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Ephesians 2:11-22, NRSV

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Ephesians 2:11-21, The Message

But don't take any of this for granted. It was only yesterday that you outsiders to God's ways had no idea of any of this, didn't know the first thing about the way God works, hadn't the faintest idea of Christ. You knew nothing of that rich history of God's covenants and promises in Israel, hadn't a clue about what God was doing in the world at large. Now because of Christ—dying that death, shedding that blood—you who were once out of it altogether are in on everything. The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. He repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then he started

over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody. Christ brought us together through his death on the cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father. That's plain enough, isn't it? You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

Study Questions:

The following questions refer to the verses quoted above the questions.

¹¹So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—

¹²remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

- What does “you” refer to in this passage?
- How were they previously described? Why was this an important piece of information?
- How were the Jews different from them? (**Ps 147:20**)
- What is circumcision (**Gn 17:9-14; Jer 4:4**)? How did St. Paul regard circumcision (**Phil 3:1-11**)?
- What does it mean to have “no hope” (cf **Rm 15:13**)?
- How did this compare with our experiences?

¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

- What is different now?

¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace,

¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near;

¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

- What did Jesus do (cf **Isa 57:19**; **St. Jn 4:21-24**; **St. Lk 23:44-49**; **Rm 3:31, 5:10**; **Heb 10:19-22**)? Please explain.
- Is this relevant to us now?

¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God,

²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord;

²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

- What is their status now (cf **Gal 2:11-14**, **Rm 9:25-26**; **11:18**)?
- What is significant about having Christ Jesus as the cornerstone (cf **Ps 118:22**)?
- What is your key takeaway lesson today? How will this change your life?

Theological summary:

The Ephesian Christians were previously separated from God. But now they had been reconciled with God through the blood of Christ and has been made one with the Jews. Both the Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians are now one with Christ at the centre.