

Ephesians
Foreigners to God and His People
Ephesians 2:11-13
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This morning, we come to the next section of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus and to the churches surrounding that area where he ministered for some three years. And it's a section that, at first glance, doesn't seem to be that relevant to us today. He's talking about the relationship (the lack of relationship) the antagonism between Jew and Gentile. But I think you will see by the time we're done that it is eminently relevant to our lives today.

When you think about the Jews, you have to ask yourself the question, why did God choose the Jews to be His chosen special people? If you go back to the beginning, back to Genesis, back to the first eleven chapters of Genesis that cover some, at least 2000 years, and depending on how long between creation and those events, up to maybe 10,000 years of time. God during that period of time is working with the people of earth as a whole. God dealt with the human race as a unit. And the testimony about man's condition, his moral condition, during those years is that man is inherently in moral rebellion against his creator.

And so, God takes a gracious step to provide men both individually and corporately with powerful testimony of His character and His purposes. God chooses Abraham. He chooses one family, and through that one man and that one family, ultimately a nation on which He will uniquely display Himself. Think of the Jewish people as a stage on which the God of the universe displays His character and sets Himself on display.

Beginning in Genesis 12, Abraham and his descendants become God's great object lesson in the world. You remember what God told Abraham in Genesis 12, in what we all the Abrahamic covenant, that is, the legally binding promise God made to Abraham? He said in verse 3, in you, Abraham, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

You fast forward to Sinai. You remember God brings the descendants of Abraham, some two million people, now a nation, out of 400 years of captivity in Egypt? And in Exodus 19 as they

gather around the foot of Sinai, God says this. Listen carefully to what He says to the children of Israel.

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagle’s wings, and brought you to Myself. Now, then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests....”

Think about that for a moment. God was telling Israel that they were to be the priests for the rest of the world. In other words, they were to serve as an intermediary between God and the rest of the earth. You will be for me a kingdom of priests. God chose Israel to be salt and light in the midst of a wicked world, to be His witness nation. That means that in choosing Israel, God was not neglecting or rejecting the rest of the peoples of the world. Instead He was choosing one man, one family, one clan, and ultimately one nation, that would be His witness to the earth. That exalted status gave the Jewish people a huge advantage over the rest of the world. Paul makes this very point in Romans 3. As he begins talking about the Jews, he says “what advantage has the Jew?” Nor remember, Paul is one. He says, or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. He goes on to say, the chief advantage they have is that they were entrusted with the oracles of God, with the word of God.

Now, as New Testament Christians, sitting in 21st century America, we don’t often think about the relationship between ourselves and the Jews. So, it’s more than a little surprising to us, when, buried in the heart of one of our favorite New Testament epistles, Paul tells us that we should think about it, and we should think about it often. And that’s where we find ourselves this morning. Let me read the passage to you. Ephesians 2:11. We won’t cover all of this today, but this is the paragraph, beginning in verse 11 and running through the end of the chapter.

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who were called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called Circumcision, which is performed in the flesh by human hands--*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. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 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, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE [THAT IS CHRIST] CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father, So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Now again, at first glance this passage doesn't seem to be that applicable to us, but I think you will see immediately that it is as we begin to unfold it together.

Notice this paragraph is linked with the previous paragraph by the one little word that begins verse 11—"Therefore" You remember, back to what we learned in verses 1 - 10. Paul is saying, because you were dead in trespasses and sins, because you were enslaved to your sin, because you were facing God's wrath, and because out of that God rescued you, I want you to think about something. I want you to remember something. Now, there is a significant difference between verses 1 - 10 and the rest of the chapter. Verses 1 - 10 are intensely personal. As individual sinners we have been saved by God from the penalty of our sin. But verses 11 - 22 is corporate. Christ's work not only involved our individual salvation, but it involved bringing each of us as individuals into unity with the rest of the people of God, regardless of their race or background. Verses 1 - 10 is universally true of every Christian. Verses 11 - 22, that section is true only of Gentile Christians.

But as you will see as we work our way through this passage, whether you are Jew or Gentile, this passage has huge ramifications for you. It has lessons that everyone of us need to learn. And if you doubt that, let me remind you to whom Paul was writing this. Paul, on his second missionary journey had founded the church in Ephesus. That was ten years before he wrote this letter. He'd led a number of the people who made up that church to Christ on that missionary journey. Then, on his third missionary journey, he came back through Ephesus, and we're told he spent almost three years with these people. And he describes his ministry to them this way. He says, I was teaching you day and night publicly and from house to house. Paul poured his life into these people for three years.

Six years after he left them, after he moved out of Ephesus and continued on his way, six years later, he writes them this letter. So, here is the apostle Paul, writing a letter to people with whom he spent three years, and he takes, in this limited amount of space that he has in this first-century letter, he takes a large amount of space to address this issue at length. So, Paul felt it was important then, that the people he had personally taught for three years consider this, remember this, so it must be important for us as well.

What's the theme of this section. In verses 11 - 22 we could say the theme of the passage is this. All Christians, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds have been united together in the church through the work of Jesus Christ. All Christians, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds are united together in the church through the work of Jesus Christ.

That's the heart of what Paul wants us to see. But he develops that theme through this section, or through this paragraph I should say, in three distinct sections. The first section is verses 11 - 13. We could call it, the reality of the union that God has accomplished, the reality of the union. In verses 14 - 18 we see the reason for the union, or the cause of the union that has been created. And in verses 19 - 22 we see the results of the union, the consequences of this union of all peoples into one in the church.

This morning, I want us to examine the first section, verses 11 - 13, and the reality of the union. Notice how he begins this section, verses 11 - 13. He begins, "therefore remember". Now, I've

told you before, the second half of this letter, chapters 4 – 6, is filled with commands, with imperatives. Do this, don't do that, but in the first half of the letter, in the first three chapters there is only one imperative. Only one command, and here it is, remember. "Remember". Very interesting word, the word "remember". It's true both in Greek as well as in English. Both the Greek word for "remember" and the English word have two distinct uses. One of them is to recall something to mind by the act or effort of memory. In other words, if you forget something, you try hard to remember it. That's one use of this word. We use it expressions like this, you better remember to file your taxes by April 15. Consider that a warning for some of you. Okay. Remember. We mean, make sure you don't forget this.

The second use of the word remember means to keep it in mind, or to remain aware of it. For example, we live in Texas and one of the great rallying cries of Texas is what? Remember the Alamo! Now that didn't mean, whatever you do, don't forget the historical event. That isn't what that means, any more than remember 9-11 means, don't forget the historical event. What we're really saying is, choose to call it to mind so that it affects your willingness to act. And that's how Paul uses the word "remember" here. He wasn't saying they had forgotten that they were Gentiles, but rather, they were at risk of not keeping it in the forefront of their mind so that it affected how they lived. And in the original text, the Greek text, the imperative is in the present tense. That means it's something you're to do constantly. We could translate it like this: Keep on continually recalling this to your mind.

And what exactly is it that, like the Ephesians, we are to keep in the front of our minds. Well, there are two issues about our relationship to God and the people of God that we are to remind ourselves often. Two things that we are to remember. And I want you to look at them with me today in this first section, verses 11 - 13. As we look at the reality of our union, there are two important issues we must remember.

First of all, we must remember our past alienation from God and His people. We must remember our past alienation, or disconnect, from God and His people. Notice the little word "formerly" in verse 11. That's a key word. He's talking about before God rescued us. Before He effected that spiritual rescue that we studied in the first ten verses. At that time, before God

rescued us, we were disconnected (notice verse 11) we were disconnected from the people of God.

It's interesting. There was a lot of animosity between the Jews and the Gentiles in the first-century world. Both the Greeks and the Romans in the first century looked down on the Jews. The Greeks called all of those who lived outside of their cities, the "ethnae". It's a word which means "pagans". They're pagans. That's how the Greeks thought of the Jews, because they didn't worship the pantheon of their gods. They're pagans.

Verse 11 tells us how the Jews, in turn, the chosen people of God, thought about the rest of the world. To them, notice verse 11, we were Gentiles in the flesh. That is, naturally, by birth, we were Gentiles. Now here's the interesting part. The Greek word translated "Gentiles" is exactly the same word that the Greeks used of non-Greeks, the ethnae, the pagans. So, they called each other pagans. That's how the Jews thought of those who were non-Jews. To be a Gentile meant to be not-a-Jew. And that meant you were, by birth, a pagan. Jews had a great deal of contempt for Gentiles in the first century world. One of the prayers that a Jewish man prayed every day was, God I thank You that I am not a Gentile. If a Jewish person in the first century married a Gentile, his family, or her family, had a funeral. The person was, to them, dead. For a Jewish person to enter the house of a Gentile rendered him unclean. That's why Jesus got so much guff from the Pharisees, because He went into the home of pagans.

But God's chosen people didn't just think of us as Gentiles, as non-Jewish pagans. Verse 11 adds, they also thought of us as the "Uncircumcision". Notice it says, you are called the Uncircumcision by the so-called Circumcision. There were a couple of other cultures in the ancient world that practiced circumcision, but the Jews were known for those who circumcised their male children. And it was a rite that was a part of their history. It goes back, this rite does, some 4000 years. You have to go all the way back to 2100 BC and the time of Abraham. God ordered Abraham, in Genesis 17 to circumcise his sons as a seal, a sign of the promise God had made Abraham. And God commanded that that physical act be continued in perpetuity. What was circumcision? Well it was nothing more than a physical sign that pointed to this reality: the descendants of Abraham had an exclusive and special relationship to the God of the universe.

That's what it was to picture. The Jews prided themselves on their faithfulness to practice this rite, but from the very beginning, they misunderstood it.

They took pride in the physical act as if that's what mattered to God. But it isn't what mattered to God. From the beginning, the important thing was not the physical act of circumcision, but that the heart was set apart to God, to love God, to follow God. In fact, you go all the way back to Deuteronomy, Moses' time, 1400 years before Christ, and Moses says this. "Circumcise your hearts." Separate yourself to God to love Him, and to obey Him, and to follow Him, to keep His commands.

You fast forward to the New Testament, Paul makes the same point over in Romans 2:28. He says,

... he is not a [real] Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. [It's not about the external.] But he is a [real] Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; ...

In fact, in Ephesians 2:11, there is a reminder that even those who had been physically circumcised were still in need of spiritual rescue. Look at verse 11. Look how Paul refers to his physical kinsmen, the Jews. He calls them the so-called circumcision, performed in the flesh by human hands. In other words, Paul's saying, for most of the Jews, circumcision was merely an external physical act. They had not circumcised their hearts, so it was absolutely worthless. First Corinthians 7, Paul says, "circumcision is nothing, uncircumcision is nothing. What matters is the keeping of the commandments of God." Look at verse 11 again. Understand Paul's main point here. It's that in the past we Gentiles were totally disconnected from the people of God. The chosen people of God thought of us as pagans, and they thought of us as those who had no participation in the exclusive and intimate relationship they had with God. But also, in the past as Gentiles, verse 12 tells us, we weren't just disconnected from the people of God. We were disconnected from God Himself. Now, we already have seen this in this chapter, haven't we? You go back to verses 1 - 3, and we see that every human being was born

disconnected from God, alienated from God. But listen carefully. This is very important. Although every human being was in a desperate circumstance before Christ came, our situation as Gentiles was much worse than even the unredeemed Jews. Why? Because we were totally disconnected from God. We were, in the words of verse 13, far off, far away from God. We weren't even close.

In verse 12, Paul describes that disconnect that we had from God as Gentiles with five great disadvantages that were true of us before Christ. Look at them. Before God found us, before Christ, we were, notice verse 12, without Christ. Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ. Now that doesn't just mean that you didn't personally know Christ, although certainly that's true. Paul means that we were disconnected from God's people, and because we were disconnected from God's people, we had no hope of the Messiah that they had hope of coming. Don't forget that the word translated Christ here, is a title. When you hear the name Jesus Christ, don't think of Jesus as His first name and Christ as His second name. Jesus is His name; Christ is a title. It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Hamashiach, or the Messiah, the anointed one of God, the one promised in the Old Testament. So, we were without a Messiah. We had no hope of a Savior. But Israel did. It was predicted as one who would come, throughout the Old Testament.

In fact, Paul makes this very argument in Romans 9. He connects the Messiah with Israel. Notice Romans 9:4. You remember the context here. He's concerned about those who don't believe in Christ who are Jewish--who are his kinsmen he says, according to the flesh. Verse 4, They "are Israelites, and to them belongs the adoption as sons, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the temple services, and the promises." Verse 5. They are the ones connected to the Fathers, that is to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. and from them, that is from Israel is the Messiah according to the flesh. That's what Paul is saying back in Ephesian 2. He's saying, as Gentiles, we didn't have any hope of a Messiah. We didn't have any hope, that the Jews did, of a Savior who would come. We were without the Messiah, without Christ.

Notice a second disadvantage that we had in verse 12 as Gentiles. Not only were we without Christ, we were without citizenship. He says, excluded, or alienated from the commonwealth of

Israel. The Greek word that's translated commonwealth here refers to the country itself, probably is the best way to take it here. So, in other words, he's saying this. As Gentiles, we were excluded from citizenship in the nation or the commonwealth of Israel. Now, I don't know about most of you, but you probably never had any great pressing desire to be a part of, to be a citizen of, the commonwealth of Israel. So, what does Paul mean here? Why is this even important?

Well, listen to Jesus explain. In Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman, a half Gentile, at the well there in Samaria. Listen to what He says in John 4:22. He says to the Samaritan woman, "You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, for [because] salvation is from the Jews." Jesus was saying, listen, if you want salvation, it doesn't come your way, it comes God's way and that is, through the Jews. In the Old Testament, if you wanted to be spiritually rescued, you had to connect yourself to the people of God. You had to connect yourself, to become, as it were, a citizen of the nation of Israel. There are a couple of examples.

Read the story of Ruth. She has to renounce her Moabite status and become one of the people of God to enjoy spiritual salvation. The same thing is true for Naaman the Syrian. You remember that general who gets leprosy. What does he do after he's healed of his leprosy? He loads up his donkey with two piles of Israeli dirt. Why? Because he's going to take back a piece of Israel with him, and even though he's going to live in Syria, he's going to worship the true God and be connected to the people through whom that salvation comes. That's how it was in the Old Testament. And we were disconnected from citizenship in the nation. Before Christ came, we were without citizenship in Israel, which meant that we were excluded from salvation.

There's a third great disadvantage to being a Gentile. We were without the covenants. Look at verse 12. "And strangers to the covenants of promise" The word "strangers" means "foreigners". It describes those who are permitted to live in a country, but who have no rights. We were foreigners to the covenants of promise.

What are the covenants of promise? In biblical terms a covenant is simply a legally binding promise made by God. What are these covenants that have promise connected with them? Well,

he's talking about the covenant made with Abraham--the promise made to Abraham of spiritual blessing. That promise was reiterated to his son--to Isaac, and to his son Jacob, and later to David. And those spiritual promises that were a part of the Abrahamic Covenant are expressed most perfectly in what covenant? The New Covenant that the Old Testament prophesied, and that Jesus perfected, and that Hebrews tells us we now participate in. But we were at that time, before Christ, foreigners. We had no right to be included in the privileges and promises of those covenants made with Abraham and his descendants. We understand this, don't we? I mean, right now, in our country, here in the United States, we are embroiled in an increasingly contentious debate about what rights foreigners, especially those who are here illegally, have to the privileges of being a citizen. What Paul wants you to understand is, in terms of God's economy, before Christ came, you were like an illegal alien. You had no rights. You had no right to expect any of the privileges that came with the promises made to God's people.

Paul adds a fourth disadvantage in verse 12. "We were without hope." This is a dark expression isn't it? Having no hope. You can survive almost anything if you have hope. But we had none. William Hendrickson defines the biblical version of hope this way. "It is the knowledge of God's promise plus confidence to its fulfillment." I know what God has promised, and I'm confident He'll fulfill it. That's hope. As Gentiles, we had no reason to hope, no reason to expect anything from God. We were without hope of any kind both in this life and in eternity. We, as the secular writer put it, lived out our lives in quiet desperation.

But we tried to hide from the lack of hope. Most people do. Unbelievers still have no hope. What do they do? They try to hide from it. They try to escape it. Kent Hughes says in his commentary, "those apart from Christ typically wrap their lives around things, and refuse to think about ultimate reality." The escape can be very intellectual on one hand, or on the other, an eternal nintendo game. Those are the alternatives people take. They immerse themselves in the intellectual, in some high pursuit, or they just bury themselves in fun and games and pleasure. But they try to escape the absence of hope. You remember in 1 Thessalonians, as Paul is talking to the Christians there, some of whom have died. And he's talking to their relatives that remain, and he says, when they die, we don't grieve like the rest who have no hope. We grieve. We just don't grieve like the rest of humanity that has no hope. That's where we were.

The fifth disadvantage we suffered as Gentiles, there in verse 12, was that we were without God, without God in the world. The Greek word is a word you'll recognize. It's the word "atheos", Atheos. It's the word from which we get our English word atheist. It occurs only here in the New Testament. In classical Greek it's used several different ways. It's used as someone who doesn't believe in the gods. It's used of someone who lives as if the gods don't exist, even though he does believe in them, and it's used of someone whom the gods have abandoned. I think here, Paul's emphasis seems to be, that as Gentiles, we did not know and believe in the true God. We may have been very religious. We may have had all kinds of different kinds of gods we worshipped. Now, in Ephesus those would have been true idols.

But because the human heart is an idol factory, before we came to faith in Christ, we worshiped idols as well. Just idols of our own making. We set up our own objects of worship--the things that were going to be important to us. But we didn't believe in the true God. In Galatians 4:8 Paul says, "at that time [before Christ] you did not know God, but were slaves to those who were not gods." First Thessalonians 4:5, "The Gentiles do not know God."

As William Hendrickson says, "when it comes to searching and knowing and finding God, we resemble mariners who without a compass and a guide were adrift in a rudderless ship during a starless night, on a tempestuous sea, far away from the harbor." No way to find our way to God.

Those were the five great disadvantages we had as Gentiles over the Jews. Now, folks, sitting here in 21st century America in Dallas-Fort Worth, it's hard for us really to grasp what it was like not to be Jewish before Christ came. Think of it like this. Imagine for a moment that there were a group of people alive today who had been chosen by the living God, and you could verify that they had been chosen by the living God. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that the true and living God had chosen them, and that through them He was going to give all the truth you needed to know about life in this world and eternity.

But, something like the FLDS, that's been in the news this week, those people whom God had chosen to be His mouthpiece, had completely sealed themselves off from the outside world. And

all we could do was stand on the outside and look in and wish that one of them would tell us what we need to know about the true and living God. That's what it was like for those who were Gentiles before Christ came. And Paul wants us to remember how it was. You understand this? If you had lived before Christ, you would have been a Gentile, looking in from the outside, without the Messiah, excluded from the promises and the covenants. Excluded from the nation through which salvation came.

You would have been without hope and without God in the world. That's where you would have been. We were Gentiles, completely disconnected from God and from His people. Now folks, it was easy in the church in Ephesus, made primarily of Gentiles, and it's easy in our church here today, where we are the majority, to forget what our situation really would have been like before Christ. So first of all, Paul says, we are supposed to remember our past alienation, our past disconnect from God and His people. That's the first thing he tells us to remember.

But secondly, we are to remember our present union with God and His people. (cough) excuse me. Not only remember our past alienation, but remember our present union with God and His people. Look at verse 13. "But now, in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Note first of all, that this union of Gentiles with Jews only happened because we were united to Jesus Christ. We were in Christ Jesus. But then notice the strange way Paul describes what has happened to us. We were far off, and now we've been brought near. What is that about? Well, this is a word picture taken from the Old Testament. You see, because God had chosen Israel, He had them build first a tabernacle, and later a temple. And God doesn't--isn't contained by a temple. The Old Testament said that. The New Testament says that. You can't put God in a box. So, what was the Temple about? The Temple was like God's address. It was sort of a place He dwelled, He specially manifested His presence. And so, in the middle of the nation of Israel, God specially manifested His presence.

And so, if you were a Jewish person, you were considered to be near to God. Because God lived right there among you. God lived at the Temple. His address was the Temple. And so, you were near. Psalm 148:14 says the sons of Israel are a people near to Him. The pagan nations, on

the other hand, were considered to be far away from God. They were outside the nation. They were a distance from God. They were far away, far off.

There are a number of references in the Old Testament to make this point. I won't take the time to take you there, but you can look at Deuteronomy 28:49, Deuteronomy 29:22, and so forth. So, to be a Jew was to be near God. To be a Gentile was to be far away from God. In fact, when a Gentile became a proselyte to Judaism, when he converted to Judaism, the rabbi said that that proselyte had been brought near. In fact, the very word "proselyte", which comes from a Greek word implies that someone has been brought nearby. But Paul is not teaching that as Gentiles we have become proselytes of Judaism. Nor is he teaching what's called replacement theology, that the church has replaced Israel.

No, he's going to argue that together, the Jews and the Gentiles have become something entirely new, the church. So, what does Paul mean then, when he says that we have been brought near? Well this comes from Isaiah 57:19. It says, "Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near, says the LORD, and I will heal him." This has to do with spiritual salvation. Bringing them near to Him and healing them spiritually. To be far away meant to be far from the true God and the spiritual blessings that come from Him. But to be brought near meant to experience salvation, to experience rescue, to experience the spiritual blessings that come from God.

But it wasn't just the Gentiles who were far off and needed to be brought near. In fact, look ahead at 2:17. He quotes Isaiah. It says, "He [that is Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far away [that's the Gentiles] and peace to those who were near [that's the Jews]." You understand what's going on here? There were those who were physically near, and those who were physically far away. But we all were spiritually far away, and Christ brought us all spiritually near to God. He's given us a spiritual connection to God and to the people of God. And how did He accomplish this amazing union, uniting us together? Look at the end of verse 13. "By the blood of Christ". That's shorthand for saying, by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. By the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for those who will believe, that's how God accomplished this reconciliation.

Folks, most of sitting in this room this morning are Gentiles by birth. We need to remember, Paul says. You need to remember that there was a time when you were totally disconnected from God and distanced from His people. If you had been born before Christ, it would have been dramatically different than it is today. We would have been without Christ, outside of Israel, without the covenants of promise, without hope, without God. But as verse 13 says, “now, in Christ Jesus, we who formerly were far off, have been brought near.” We have the Messiah. We are now heirs of the covenants of promise. We have hope. And listen to this, the God of Israel is not ashamed to call Himself the God of Gentiles, of those who were once pagans.

Now for most of us, when we look at this passage, it’s hard to apply it, because the first-century antagonism between Jew and Gentile just doesn’t exist for us. We just don’t think in those categories. So, what is the practical application of this union, this connection that has been made for us. Let me give you a couple of thoughts. Here’s what to do with this.

Number one. This union, (the reality of this union of Jew and Gentile together in Christ) should drive us to constantly remember where we would be apart from the grace of Christ. This is Paul’s main argument here, his main command is “remember”. Keep on remembering. Don’t forget what your life would be like if you lived before Christ came, or if Christ had never come. You would be completely disconnected from God and His people. Don’t forget it. Bring it to your mind.

Number two. The reality of this union of Jew and Gentile into one should destroy all ethnic pride that we have in ourselves, all the ethnic pride that we have in ourselves. I don’t care what your background is, what your race, what your ethnic background may be. In the end only Jews have the great advantages. But even they with all of their advantages were spiritually far away. So, you know what it does? It levels the playing field. We’re all in the same boat in the same need of the same rescue, and we can’t take pride in who we are by birth, anything about who we are by birth.

Number three. The reality of this union should destroy all ethnic prejudice toward others. Paul is here saying, don't for a moment take pride in who you were--whether you're a Gentile, looking down on the Jews, or Jews looking down on the Gentiles. Whatever your background is, stop the prejudice because we have been united. All of us, all races, all backgrounds have been united in the church in Christ. And it's absolutely wrong for us to hold onto those old prejudices. One specific application of this is, there's a tendency for Christians, in some cases, to be anti-semitic. Martin Luther, as much as I respect him for many things, was profoundly anti-semitic. Listen, Paul does not allow that as we will see next week.

Number four. What we learn in this passage should remind us that salvation is not primarily individualistic. Salvation is individual. You can only be rescued as an individual. But that's not the end of the story. At the moment of salvation, we are at that same moment baptized into Christ, Paul says, and united with the rest of His body. We are part of the body of Christ. We are part of a redeemed community. God's plan is bigger than us. We are part of a plan that has a cosmic scale. You see, our salvation not only reconciles us to God, but it connects us to each other as well. This is hard for us to get sometimes because we think along the paths of old loyalties.

Imagine for a moment, that you needed a physical heart transplant. I hope that doesn't happen to you, but imagine that that were a reality. As the surgeon placed that heart within your body, the very moment it begins to beat, it is immediately connected to every other member of your body. The same is true for you. It happened when you were saved. You became, at the moment you were saved, part of Christ's body. You were inseparably joined to every other member of the body. Listen, you are just as really connected to the other Christians in this church as your heart is connected to the rest of your physical body. That's why we're to love each other. That's why we're to care for each other. We are united in Christ, the Bible teaches. It is a reality. What does that mean for us day in and day out? Well, the rest of Ephesians, as we'll see as we go along, points to very practical implications: things like unity, things like forgiveness of one another as we sin against each other, love for others, concern for the needs for others. And it's all built on this reality that we are part of each other. We are connected. Paul intentionally uses

our union with each other as the basis for much of what he will command in the second half of the letter.

Let me just show you a couple of examples. Look over in Ephesians 4. See how he comes back to this concept, Ephesians 4:1. Therefore, in the light of all I've taught you, I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called. Do it in humility, and gentleness with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love. Why? Because you need to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Because, after all, he says in verse 4,

*There is one body [there's] one Spirit, ... you were called in one hope....
[There's] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father....*

Listen, you're one. You're united. So, live like that. Relate to each other like that. Verse 13, we're supposed to be striving for the unity of the faith. Verse 16, the whole body is supposed to be fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part so that the whole body grows in love. You see how he keeps coming back to this theme. Look at verse 25. He gets really practical. Don't lie to other Christians. Why? For we are members of one another. The eye doesn't lie to the foot. In the same way, we're not to lie to each other.

Let me show you one other example. Look over at Ephesians 5:30. Buried right in the middle of a very practical passage about marriage, and how wives are to respond to their husbands, and how husbands are to respond to their wives, he gives this as the basis for his argument. Verse 30, because we are members of His body. Husbands, you ought to love and take care of your wives, not for some selfish reason, because of what you're going to get out of it, but because she's a fellow member of the body with you, and you ought to treat her right because of that. Wives, back up in verse 22, you're to be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the body. Remember, you're part of the body, and Christ is the head, and in your home, the husband is to be the head. He comes back to that very same picture. We're connected, so respond to each other as if you're connected.

Let me give you this sort of overarching thought. Who do you feel in this world, most connected to? Is it your earthly family? Well, it shouldn't be if they're not in Christ. It should be to the fellow Christians. You remember Christ, when his family, Mary and His brothers who didn't believe in Him came, and they thought He was insane, and they came to take Him home. And Jesus was sitting there in the house, and they come, and they say, listen, your mother and your brothers are outside. What do you want us to do about it? Jesus said, now let me tell you, they're not really my mother and my brothers. And He pointed to His disciples sitting around Him, and He said these are my mother and my brothers and my sisters. That's the spirit we're to have as well. We are united to other Christians so that that becomes the most profound connection we experience in life. And if that isn't how you think, then let me encourage you to stop thinking like a human, and start thinking with the mind of Christ. We are united in Him.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for this beautiful and profound passage that reminds us of what our lives would be like as Gentiles if Christ had never come, or if we lived before He came. Lord, it makes us so much more grateful for Him and what He has done, that instead of being without the Messiah, He is our Lord and Savior. Instead of being excluded from a relationship with the people of God, we are part of the people of God. Instead of being strangers and foreigners to those promises you made, we have become heirs of those promises. Father, instead of having no hope, we have nothing but hope in Your Word, in Your promises. And Father, instead of being without You, without the true knowledge of You, without a relationship with You, You have made us Your very own children by adoption.

Oh, God, help us to understand these things, and help us to live in light of them. Help us to remember that You have united us together from all kinds of different backgrounds, all kinds of different races, and You've joined us together inseparably in the body of Christ in the church, so that we would love and care for one another. Lord, make the relationships we know with fellow-believers to be the most profound and the richest.

May we love and serve them as we would love and serve Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.