

Ephesians 2:11-22

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[0 : 00] Well, it is a pleasure to be back here again with you today, especially coming to share God's word with you. I always like that. A spirit rang me and he asked me about what something to speak about. So I was watching RT News. I don't know how many of you watch RT, but I've become quite a fan of the Russian television news.

And the first story was on Syria and the second was on Iraq and the third one was on the Labour Party and the fourth one was on the Conservative Party. And then finally, the last one was on Chelsea football team. And the one thing that they all had in common was a lack of unity, a lack of peace.

There's trouble going in on all these issues. And so I thought, you know, as Christian people, it is a fantastic thing to look what God has offered us and promised to us.

So I thought Ephesians 2, 11 to 22 would be a good passage to look at today. And if you keep your Bibles open to page 1175, it might help you to, because I'm going to take it pretty much verse by verse.

But to put it in context, the first three chapters of Ephesians are mainly focused on the grace of God. In chapter one, Paul states that those who are called into the kingdom of God were appointed to eternal life before they were ever born.

[1 : 13] And he says that when the salvation of men and women is traced back to its true and fundamental source, we find that our salvation is a wonderful act of God's mercy toward us.

Solely a result of his free election. And then in chapter two, he began to show us how God brings each person into the body of Christ. And here we see the power of divine grace and action.

Firstly, Paul reminds us and the Ephesians of how wretched they were before they were called to Christ. The total depravity of all men and women apart from Jesus before they are rescued by God. And then in verse four, he starts the explanation of how these same men and women are brought to life in Christ. How God loved us, how God raised us from the dead.

And this was where we see that wonderful and beautiful truth of salvation by grace through faith alone. And he underlines for us again that we were saved not by our own efforts, not by our own works, but that we were saved by God alone.

[2 : 26] Adopted into the family of God and seated with Christ solely by the grace of God. And then we come to our passage, verse 11. And Paul starts to explain what that meant for the Ephesians and to us now to be in the body of Christ.

And his central point is that the one body of Christ draws all people together. People from the most extreme situations. Even those people who were actually enemies.

They may have hated each other prior to being in Christ. We are all drawn together in him. And by being alive in Christ, each one of us has received a common eternal life.

And he starts his explanation there in verse 11 by using a well-known situation of his day, which everyone then would have understood. The relationship between Jew and Gentile.

That is everybody. You are either a Jew or you're not. Which means you're a Gentile. And the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles was extremely hostile. There was a deep and abiding hostility between them.

[3 : 34] And what fed that hostility was the exclusiveness of Judaism. Their customs and their self-consciousness as a people set apart. God's true and only people. It was an exclusiveness that led the Jews to regard Gentiles as inferiors.

Even to refer to them as the unclean. And these Jews produced a mutual animosity toward the Jews on the part of the Gentiles who resented the Jewish view of them.

Now the Gentiles also considered the Jewish religion and their ways of life as strange, bizarre, offensive in various ways. And Paul is primarily writing here from the point of view of the Gentiles. He says in verse 11, Remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who are the circumcision.

Ever since the days of Abraham, the right of circumcision has served as the covenantal sign of the unique relationship between God and the nation of Israel. And the Jews gloried in this special relationship.

[4 : 39] And in their pride, they contemptuously referred to the Gentiles as the uncircumcised. And as far as the Gentiles were concerned, it represented the social alienation experienced by them at the hands of the Jews.

So Paul now, having reminded them of their former social alienation in verse 11, he then reminds them of their former spiritual alienation in verse 12. He writes, Remember that at the time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise.

Without hope, and without God in the world. In other words, he's saying to them, You are Christless, you are stateless, you are hopeless, you are godless, and you were trapped by Satan in sin.

They were not only socially and spiritually alienated from God's people, but they were also alienated from God. And then in verse 13, Paul uses the term that they were far off, or far away.

And what Paul has underlined for them so far is the bad news of their former life. But then after all the bad news, notice the first word of verse 13. But, he says, But now.

[5 : 57] Yes, I reminded you, and it was true, you were despised, you were alienated, you were far away. But now, that is all in the past. What was then is no longer.

This is now. And through the Lord Jesus, he says in verse 13, You are no longer far away, because now, you have been brought near, by the blood of Christ.

And Paul is saying that it is the blood of Christ, that invites us into this relationship, to being in the body of Christ. Paul says in verse 14, that it is the peace of Christ, for he himself is our peace, that has made us both one.

He says Jew and Gentile become one in Christ, in one fellowship. No longer alienated from each other, but united by the blood, and by the body of Christ.

Now, as we said, the enmity between the Jew and the Gentile, was deep and ancient. And in verse 14, Paul refers to again, in the image of this dividing wall of hostility.

[7 : 02] In the temple, there was a large wall, that separated the Jews in the inner temple, from everybody else who was in the temple. And on this huge wall, in several places, was a sign in both Greek and Latin, that read, no man of another race, is to enter within this fence, in the enclosure around the temple.

Whoever is called, will only have himself to thank, for the death that follows. Now that is a plain message of hostility, to the Gentiles, isn't it?

And Paul uses this physical reference, of the wall in the temple, to say that, the Lord Jesus has now entirely, wiped out, the dividing wall of hostility. And that is Paul's great message, to both the Jew, and to the Gentiles, that when we come to Christ, we are now all one in Christ.

All the distinctions are gone. Religious, social, financial, racial, historical, ethnic, they all fade away, they are all overcome, by the Lord Jesus.

Jesus has broken down this barrier, and in him, Jews and Gentiles, all meet on the common ground, of the cross. And notice at the end of verses 15 and 16, that he might create in himself, one new man, in place of the two, so making peace, and he might reconcile us, both to God, in one body, through the cross.

[8 : 33] In other words, the cross has swept away, all of the obstacles. And as Jews and Gentiles, at one point united, to crucify Christ in the past, now Jews and Gentiles, are united in Christ, as one body, of believers.

I mean this is beautifully illustrated, throughout the New Testament, especially in the ministry of Jesus. He called a range, of different type of people, into a loving community. People who would have, otherwise had nothing to do, with each other, find companionship, and friendship, in this community.

Prostitutes, and tax collectors. Roman soldiers, and Jewish priests. Gentile, Gentiles, Athenian philosophers. Masters, and slaves. And Paul says, it was, the message, of peace, that Jesus

brought, that brought them all together.

The peace, that was preached, by the Lord Jesus, you see, was available now, to all people, Jews and Gentiles. All people, are included. Verse 17 says, and he came, and preached, peace to you, who were far off, and peace, to those, who were near.

You see, they all needed, to hear the message, of Jesus, whether they were far away, or whether they were near, because they were all, equally lost. They were all, at that point, outside of the body, of Christ.

[9 : 58] They were at war, with each other. And not only, were they at war, with each other, but they were also, at war, with God. Romans 3, 23 says, there is no difference, between Jews, and Gentiles, for all have sinned, all have fallen short, of the glory of God.

You see, they were all, equally in need, of Christ, and his message, of peace. The story, of the prodigal son, is a perfect illustration. That smug, and surly, elder brother, was just as lost, as the young prodigal.

One was far off, the other was near, but both were, equally, estranged, from the father, and both needed, to be reconciled to him. I mean, they both expressed, their rebellion, and pride, and in their own ways, but, they both had, the same inner need, for forgiveness, and for grace.

And this piece, that unites, men and women, to God, and to one another. This piece, that only God, alone can give, is a powerful, it's a wonderful thing.

You see, the world doesn't know it. They may have, an ill-defined, longing for it, but they cannot, they will not, ever find it, apart from God.

[11 : 14] In Isaiah 57, the Lord speaks, about peace, the peace that, he gives, and the peace that, the world seeks, but we'll never find, without him. Isaiah writes, peace, peace to the far, and to the near, says the Lord.

But the wicked, are like the tossing sea. It cannot be quiet, and as waters, toss up mire, and dirt, there is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

And so it is, you see, human beings, and the world, lack peace, and therefore, the world, lacks peace. And what we see, happening in Syria, and Iraq, for example, is only a more dramatic, example of what, is happening every day, in the world, around us, all the time.

You see, it's not only nations, and people who are at war, and filled with hatred, but it's husbands, and wives, parents, and siblings, employers, employees. Ever since, Adam listened to Eve, on disobey God.

Ever since, they listened to another voice, other than God, and became subject, to another power. Human life, has been characterized, by restlessness, conflict, jealousy, envy, hatred, alienation, chaos.

[12 : 24] It's like Isaiah said, it is, it's always there, it cannot be still. It's like the tossing sea, and the waves, they just can't stop. Always, this agitation, is going on, and on, and on.

And what we see, in the world, in human relationships, is simply, an expression, of the alienation, and the chaos, that lies deep, in the heart, of the individual.

It starts out, as an alienation, and a separation, from God, and the true purpose, of life. And then it begins, to express itself, in the alienation, the separation, from each other.

And these two issues, of alienation, and isolation, they're from the same, spiritual reality, but as they begin, to grow, they begin to feed, on one another. You see, I think, what Paul wants us, to understand here, is that, there is no peace, with God, that does not, create peace, between men, and women.

There is no peace, in the human heart, that does not, express itself, in our relationships, with each other. And the solution, the answer, to our alienation, and our isolation, is the gospel, of Jesus Christ.

[13 : 39] You see, the gospel, that he brings, is a gospel of peace. Peace with each other, and peace with God. Get your Bibles open, you'll see it there, verse 14, Paul says, the Lord Jesus, is our peace.

In verse 15, he says, he makes our peace. In verse 17, he came, and he preached, peace. And this blessing, of peace, through Jesus Christ, is what reconciles, us to each other, it reconciles, us to God.

And in verse 18, Paul says, it is this peace, that gives us access, to the Father. Verse 18 says, that this access, is made possible, as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, unite to bring us back.

They unite, to reconcile us, to God. And notice that, the whole Trinity, is in that verse. through him, Christ, we have access, in one spirit, to the Father.

Now, I can honestly say to you, that I am not sure, exactly how this works. How the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all work together, in this event. I just, certainly it's one of these things, I will understand better, when I get to heaven.

[14:52] But still, let's just be sure, what he says there, verse 18. He says that, those who are in Christ, have access to God. Through Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

In other words, those who had been socially, and spiritually alienated, from God, and each other, are now socially, and spiritually united, through the work, of the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. You know, Paul has used most of, verses 13 to 18, to present, and explain this, great doctrine, to us. And still, he comes to the last section there, verses 19 to 22, and he still has more to say. It's like, he wants to be sure, that we hear this. In case there's any doubt, in our minds, about this doctrine, he closes with three, final metaphors, to further explain, the unity of believers, of the body of Christ.

And once again, he reminds him, in verse 19, you are no longer, strangers and aliens. And then he says, we are now, in verse 19, fellow citizens. Then he says, we are members, of God's household.

[16:03] And thirdly, in verses 20 and 21, he says, we are a temple, resting on the foundation, of Christ himself. You know, as fellow Christians, as fellow citizens, as he says there, in Christ, we are members, of the same commonwealth.

There is a new fellowship. We are fellow citizens, with all the saints, who have ever lived. Imagine that. Philippians 3.20, says very plainly, our citizenship, is in heaven.

We are all citizens, of the same kingdom, living under, the same authority. And secondly, as members, of the same household, we are brothers, and sisters in Christ.

We are members, of the family of God. We are heirs together, of the new covenant. He considers us, his children. We are children, of the living God.

The thing about this, we are brothers, and sisters, in the royal family, of heaven. Thirdly, Paul, uses this illustration, of the foundation, of the temple.

[17:08] He sees the church, as a glorious building, that rests, on this magnificent, foundation, of Christ, and his apostles. Everything rests. Everything is anchored, upon the Lord Jesus, who is the cornerstone, of the foundation.

Now, before their conversion, the Gentiles, were building on, man's idol philosophies, or vain pagan religions. The Jews, were there part, of the building, on the burden, of rabbi traditions.

None of these, foundations, would ever last. They were all, built on sand. But after accepting Christ, and becoming part, of the body of Christ, we rest, in unity, as one body, upon the enduring, foundation, of Christ, the apostles, and the prophets, he says.

Verse 22 says, that we are being, built together, into a dwelling place, for the spirit of God. This is who we are. This is who we are, a dwelling place, for the spirit of God.

I mean, just try to imagine that. Every stone, we're the stones. Every stone is, perfectly shaped for purpose. There are no imperfections. Every stone, perfectly chiseled, each and every one of us, is perfectly formed, and placed.

[18:27] And Paul says, as he says these things to us, as amazing as they may seem, he says, these are just simply, the facts of the matter. That by the grace of God, and the sacrifice of Christ, we have been brought, into peace with God, and into peace, with one another.

There was a time, when we were all, separated from God, and sharing a common fate. But now, we share, a common experience, of God's love.

And we share the fact, that there is a common inheritance, for us, in heaven. And I was thinking, you know, if we know this truth, and we feel the wonder of it, then we must have an urge, to try to live it out.

We must do honor, to a savior, as great, as the son of God. A salvation, as great as this, that has made us, alive, that has, lifted us up to heaven, that has, gathered us up, into God's family.

I mean, these are favors, that not one of us here today, is even remotely, worthy of. But they are favors, that we ought to feel, every day, in our everyday lives.

[19:37] And if you're like me, well then you, you do know what it is still, to struggle with fears, and alienation, with anxiety, in your heart. And even if you know this, if you are a Christian, this afternoon, then, I can still assure you, that you have peace with God.

You may not feel it today, you may not always feel it. But God promises, that it's yours. There are times, when we fight with God, there are times, when we push Him away. There are times, when we refuse, to trust fully, in His promises. But even, in the midst of those times, it should comfort you, and me to know, that His peace, is still there, for us. God has brought you, near to Himself. He has made, peace with you. He has brought you, into His family. He is building you, your very self, into a holy temple, in which He will dwell. He has set you, into the heavenly realms, with Christ. And He has made you, an eternal, citizen, of heaven. So in view, of all that wonder, of all that, extraordinary privilege, when we watch, RT News, or whatever it is, is there anything, that should ever fill our hearts, with unease, or disquiet, with anxiety, or this, sense of alienation, of chaos, that the world, in general, suffers from? [20 : 58] I mean, think about it. Jesus, the Son of God, has shed His blood, to make you, His own, brother or sister. And through His sacrifice, on the cross, and the work, of the Holy Spirit, you have access, to God, the Father Himself.

what can there be, in our lives, that should ever, make us feel, that things are not right. So if you're here, this afternoon, and you're a believer, you're a Christian, then I pray, that you will, find comfort, in what we see, here in this letter, that, and I pray, that you will find peace, in the knowledge, that you have been, redeemed by the Son, that you've been, reconciled to the Father, and you are being, renovated daily, by the Holy Spirit. So let me, pray for us.