

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for August 5, 2018

Brought Near
Ephesians 2:11-13

I. The sign of separation (2:11)

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—

- Paul transitions to his new thought in verse 11 with this first word, “therefore”
 - Paul is building on all that he has previously stated in verses 1-10
 - This means Paul is acknowledging the practical importance of recognizing that salvation is all of God in His grace
 - Paul also acknowledges that believers must rise up to live fruitful lives of good works in light of God’s gracious salvation (verse 10)
 - These good works must include the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church
 - Thus, the way that individuals respond to God’s salvation has a massive impact upon how they will interact with others
 - Vertical most certainly becomes horizontal
- Paul specifically addresses the Gentiles in our verses this morning
- He calls the Gentiles to remember their own personal and unique separation from God
 - Paul had already addressed the common separation of every man before God
 - He had sufficiently shown that all mankind is dead in sins until God makes them alive in Christ according to verses 1-7 of this chapter
- Now, in verse 11, Paul reminds the Gentiles of a most obvious sign of separation between the Gentiles and the Jewish people of God—the sign of circumcision
- Circumcision was a theologically distinguished practice for the Jewish people
 - The history of the practice for the Jewish people was rooted in the Old Testament
 - Specifically in Genesis 17, God commanded Abraham to have every male of his household circumcised
 - God would specify in Genesis 17 that this surgical procedure for males was to take place when they were 8 days old as a baby
 - This was not just a random commandment from God
 - Circumcision was a symbol or sign to signify the covenant that God had made with Abraham
 - God’s covenant with Abraham signified that he and his family had been chosen by God and elected to be the means by which blessing would be brought back into the world

- Thus, circumcision became another one of the many ways that God wanted Israel, His people, to be uniquely separate and distinct from the nations
- The Jewish people took this practice of circumcision seriously
- In fact, it was because of this practice and uniqueness that the Jewish people viewed the rest of the world, no matter the national background, as uncircumcised
- For the Jewish people, Gentile and uncircumcised became synonymous terms and titles
 - 1 Samuel 17:26 “And David said to the men who stood by him, ‘What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?’”
- And that is what Paul is recognizing here in Ephesians 2:11
 - Paul identifies some name-calling that has happened
 - The Jewish people also known as “the circumcision” would call the Gentiles “the uncircumcision”
- This shows that the Jewish people thought highly of themselves and looked down upon the Gentiles for this practice alone
 - However, this prideful way of thinking and name-calling actually highlighted a very massive problem with the Jewish people
 - This shows the tendency of the Jews to rely upon their own efforts as their means for righteousness
 - Paul highlighted this in his own ministry to the Philippians
 - Philippians 3:4-5 “If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;”
 - In fact, this was a major issue in the church as we have already seen in the book of Acts
 - Acts 15 discusses the first major church council that we are aware of that took place in Jerusalem
 - The prompting for such a meeting in the early church revolved primarily around whether or not circumcision was necessary for salvation
 - Did the Gentiles have to be circumcised in addition to their faith in Christ in order to be saved?
 - The Jerusalem Council obviously concluded that circumcision was not necessary for Gentiles to be saved
 - However, as we see here in Ephesians, so also we see in other NT letters that the Apostles have to remind the church that faith alone in Christ alone is what saves individuals, not some special work like circumcision
- This is why Paul actually takes a shot at the Jewish view of circumcision in verse 11

- Paul actually exposes circumcision for all it really is—a work that is “made in the flesh by hands”
- Salvation is a supernatural work of God causing us to be born again!
- Circumcision is simply a surgical procedure done by human hands
- Even the Old Testament recognized the limitations of physical circumcision
 - Deuteronomy 30:6 “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”
- Thus, Paul also highlighted the spiritual circumcision of the heart
 - Colossians 2:11-12 “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”
- While the Gentiles were not partakers in the physical procedure of circumcision, Paul still recognized the limitations of physical circumcision
- However, Paul continues in our text to detail the deeper separation that the Gentiles experienced before Christ

II. The significance of separation (2:12)

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

- At this point, Paul identifies 5 different aspects of the separation that the Gentiles experienced
- First, the Gentiles were separated from the Person of Christ or the Messiah
 - Paul says, “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ”
 - To be Jewish was to have all of one’s hope in a Jewish Messiah
 - Early on, the Old Testament prophesied a ruler from the tribe of Judah
 - This ruler would be a descendant of David
 - He would be born of a virgin and come from Bethlehem
 - Of course, He would come to do a great work
 - He would be forsaken by God to bear the sins of His people
 - He would be sinless, yet He would be crushed for the sin of others
 - He would also reign as King over Israel and all the nations one day
 - This was the Jewish hope of their Jewish Messiah
 - Gentiles did not have such a hope
 - The world still loves the concept of a great leader
 - The world longs to have someone rule justly and peacefully

- It does not matter how many elections are held—the world will not find the Messiah
- The Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth and the Gentiles were separated from such Messianic hope in their own leaders and nations
- Second, the Gentiles were separated from the people of God—Israel
 - Paul next says, “remember that you were... alienated from the commonwealth of Israel”
 - The Gentiles were not a united people group
 - Instead, they were a mixed group of nations unified by varying factors such as land, law, and ethnicity
 - The Jewish people were unique, not because they had their own land, law, and ethnicity
 - The Jewish people were unique because they had relationship with Yahweh, the one true God
 - Relationship with God is something the Gentiles did not have
 - Of course, Gentiles had what they thought were gods and religions
 - These of course were nothing more than vain, empty idolatry
- Third, the Gentiles were separated from the promises of God in the covenants
 - Paul goes on to say, “remember that you were... strangers to the covenants of promise”
 - One of the main evidences of Israel’s relationship with God was through the covenants or agreements that God made with Israel
 - Abrahamic covenant
 - Promised in Genesis 12
 - Land, nation, blessing
 - Genesis 12:2-3 “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
 - Ratified in Genesis 15
 - God, Himself, walking between severed animals
 - Davidic covenant
 - Promised in 2 Samuel 7
 - House/Dynasty
 - Descendant of David on throne forever
 - 2 Samuel 7:16 “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”
 - New covenant
 - Promised in Jeremiah 31

- Forgiveness of sin
- Unlike Mosaic covenant
- Jeremiah 31:33-34 “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people... For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”
- Fourth, the Gentiles were separated from any hope
 - Paul says that the Gentiles were “having no hope”
 - How could the Gentiles have hope when they had no revelation or knowledge from God regarding His plan?
 - The most the Gentiles could do is wish for better days to randomly come to them by chance and good fortune
 - Much like the shifting seas of the nations that would rise and fall during ancient times, the Gentiles had no certainty of what would happen in the future
 - Much more concerning, the Gentiles had no ability to have confidence about the future beyond their present life
 - What did the next life hold for them?
 - They could not know for sure and they could not have much hope!
 - “Because the Gentiles did not have Israel’s privilege of God’s revelation, they had nothing to look forward to. They had no expectation that God would work in their lives. They had no knowledge of salvation that would include a future resurrection and life eternal. They had no idea of future messianic deliverance and blessings.”¹
- Fifth, the Gentiles were separated from God in this world
 - Paul states that the Gentiles were “without God in the world”
 - This condition of being without God was obviously true since mankind’s only options are to worship the one true God or something/someone that is not a god
 - It is not Israel’s fault that the Gentiles did not know God
 - Romans 1:18-21 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 360.

knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

- “They were ‘without God in the world.’ While Gentiles had many gods, they did not recognize the true God because they did not want Him (see Rom. 1:18–26).”²
- Truly this is a significant separation that the Gentiles have experienced
 - Not only a separation in terms of sinful depravity before a holy God (2:1-3)
 - Also a separation from God’s own people who failed to reach the world
 - Ideally, Israel would have been the holy nation and royal priesthood God had called them to be unto the world
 - Exodus 19:5-6 “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”
 - Since Israel failed, God brought salvation through His Son

III. The solution to separation (2:13)

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

- Much like Ephesians 2:4 “But God...” so we have here another transition that brings hope, joy and relief, “But now...”
- Given the significantly hopeless separation of the Gentiles, one would think there is truly nothing that can be done
- Yet, Paul directs our attention right back to the cross of Jesus Christ
 - No situation is hopeless in light of the blood of Christ
 - The cross truly can transform, heal, change, and fix any hopeless situation
- Paul states that the Gentiles who were far off from God have now been brought near
 - The Old Testament often described Gentiles and foreigners as those who were far off
 - This is the power of the cross of Christ
 - God, based upon His own initiative, sends His Son to accomplish salvation for all—regardless of nationality or ethnicity
 - All can now be brought near to God, not because they have the Torah or are circumcised, but because they have trusted in Jesus and Jesus alone
 - This is even how Peter preached at the beginning of the church in Acts 2
 - Acts 2:39 “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

² John MacArthur Jr., ed., The MacArthur Study Bible, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1805.

- Paul specifies that “blood of Christ” is what brings Gentiles near
 - The blood of Christ redeems and forgives as we saw in Ephesians 1:7
 - The blood of Christ satisfies God’s holy demands
 - The blood of Christ proves the wrath of God has been poured out on sin
 - The blood of Christ is better than the blood of animals
 - The blood of Christ does not only remind us of our sin but the blood of Christ actually removes our sin far from us
 - The blood of Christ was offered once for all
 - Now, people from all nations and backgrounds can have hope and be brought near to God because Christ’s blood has been shed on their behalf