



Citizens of the Promise

Last week, in [Ephesians 2:5-10](#), we saw how Paul defended that our salvation is by God's grace, not by our own works, affirming a key doctrine of the Christian faith. But he didn't stop emphasizing this point, as we'll see in today's text. And to better appreciate this passage, we need to understand its audience.

Ephesus was located in what today is the southwest corner of Turkey. The city was the 3rd largest in the Roman empire, and its population was made up primarily of Greeks, Lydians, and Jews. Rome also sent many of its citizens to live there to protect the interests of the Empire. So, while it was a diverse population, the church itself seemed to be made up primarily of Greek speaking Gentiles, however the Jewish influence remained present in the church. And as Scripture tells us, the Jewish people lived under and abided by many religious laws, some given by God, but many created over time by deceitful leaders. They had great pride in obeying these laws (aka: works) which, in their mind, maintained their standing with God.

Now let's look at what Paul wrote in [Ephesians 2:11-17](#). I admit this is a lot to unpack, so we're today we're just going to focus on one key point.

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are 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. [Eph 2:11-16](#) NASB

Considering the context of the preceding verses, we can see that Paul is continuing his assertion that works (like circumcision) do not save us, faith does. As I mentioned, the Jewish people lived under many rules and laws, circumcision of male children being one of them. And because of this they often looked down on Gentiles (sinners) who did not follow these rules, treating them as aliens, outsiders, and even 'dogs' (cf: [Matt 15:24-27](#)).

By Paul saying his readers were to remember that they were ***formerly excluded from the commonwealth*** (or citizenship) of Israel, he was referring to how Gentiles were not part of the Abrahamic covenant with God. This does not mean that before Christ it was impossible for



Gentiles to be saved; [Hebrews 11](#) makes mention of many who were not Jewish by birth being included in the faith. But Gentiles did not share in the promise God made with the nation of Israel through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because Israel was supposed to be an example and light to the Gentiles ([Gen 18:17-19](#), [Isaiah 42:6-7](#)).

And then Paul uses that beautiful conjunction “but”. ***“But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”*** Paul reveals that through Christ’s sacrifice we can now share in this covenant. The promise was given to and carried forward by the Jews, but finally through Christ it was extended to all nations through faith. Christ ***broke down the barrier***, and ***abolished the enmity of the Law***, in effect bringing together all saints as one holy people, reconciled and sanctified by His blood shed on the cross.

A few verses later Paul drives this point home when he says, ***“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,”*** ([Eph 2:19](#))

So, what’s our takeaway? We Gentiles are now citizens of the nation God promised to Abraham 4000 years ago, and this is by ***grace through faith, not by works*** ([Eph 2:8](#)). Circumcision and other superficial works of the flesh done by human hands do not save us, but instead our faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross saves us. And being saved, we now share in the promise, being grafted into the vine of God’s chosen people.

For additional reading on this topic and how Gentiles relate to Israel, check out [Romans 11](#).

~Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece