

## The Mystery of the Church Part 1 Eph.2:11-16 “Remember!” 11-30-2003

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)- 12 remember that at that 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. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

### Introduction:

We spent the first several months of this year studying the wonders of our salvation in Eph.1,2. And one question that comes up when you think through the incredible wonders of what it means to be adopted as a child of God is why doesn't it have a greater effect on the way we live? Why do we pray, but with so little fervor and affection and intensity? Why do we sing but so often not from the heart and with blank expressions? Why are so few hearts breaking for the lost people around them? Why is there so little fear and trembling as we work out our salvation? What is the explanation for the lack of passion in our faith, when we claim to believe God's Word when it talks about how wonderful our salvation is?

Maybe part of the problem is the fact that we try to focus on how wonderful salvation is, and not enough on how terrible our former condition was. Failing to have an awareness and a consciousness of our former plight will sap the joy out of the Christian life. So in Eph.2:11 we find the very first command in the book. And enjoy this one, because we won't see another command until half way through ch.4.

## Gentiles

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men) Remember that at that 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.

Throughout all of ch.1,2,3 and half of 4, God only asks one thing of us – that we remember something. He starts out by addressing those of us who were born Gentiles ethnically. And the way he says it reminds us some of the hostility Jews held toward Gentiles. The word “uncircumcised” is literally the word “foreskin.” The Jews referred to Gentiles as “the forskins.”

Jews look with great disdain on those who were not circumcised, because circumcision was the mark of God's covenant with His people. Remember David when he heard Goliath mocking Israel? **Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"** (1 Sam 17:26) So from Paul's wording we get an idea of the hostility the Jews had for us as Gentiles. He also gives a hint here that all is not necessarily well for the Jews, if their circumcision is *merely* physical. So anyway, in v.11 Paul basically says, “Hey you Gentiles...”

### 12 remember

It's not a suggestion. It's a command. Remember. “Remember what?”

**Remember that at that time**

“What time?”

V.11 says **formerly**. It points to some time in the past when we were Gentiles.

**Remember that at that 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.**

That's bad. It's important that you remember that those 5 terrible things were all true of you, and it's important that you remember it as a real calamity. It's like in Deuteronomy, when over and over the people are told, "remember that you were slaves in Egypt." It is part of the Christian walk. It is important. We need to make sure we don't just leapfrog over it and begin reading at verse 13 (about being restored and brought near). That kind of leapfrogging has landed much of the church right into the kettle indifferent Christianity and tepid love for God. Your appreciation of God's grace is directly related to the depth of the pit you think you were drawn from.

In Luke 7:47, Jesus made it clear that your love for God is determined by how much you realize you have been forgiven. If you feel you have been forgiven a little bit, you will love God a little bit. If you have a great awareness of how much you have been forgiven, you will have a great love for God. So Paul is trying to help you by showing you how disastrous our former situation really was.

Some Christians misunderstand election, and assume that their salvation was inevitable, and so their lostness wasn't a real lostness. The threat of hell was never a real threat. That's about as far from the truth of Scripture as you can get. Back in v.3 we saw that we who are now saved, prior to our conversion, were by nature objects of God's wrath. We weren't objects of God's wrath in theory. We were that *by nature*.

## **Doomed because of sin**

Look at the first word in v.11.

### **Therefore**

In case you don't remember where we left off 6 months ago, look back up to v.1

**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.**

We were really lost and really doomed and really on the way to hell. And had we died prior to the day of our conversion, we would be in hell right now. That means you. If you go up to an actor who just filmed a horror film and ask, "Are you relieved that the monster didn't kill you?" he will say, "No. The monster wasn't real. There was no real threat." There is no sense of relief because the threat was a fake threat. We tend to think that way about our former condition. We get to thinking our salvation was inevitable and that the threat of hell was just a fake threat. The truth is, you and I were just a heartbeat away from spending eternity in hell. If one careless driver veered just a little bit, or you inhaled some germ, or a thousand other things that could have ended your fragile life... Had that happened prior to your conversion, you would be in hell right now. That's where you and I deserve to go, you know. That's the proper place for us, who are sinners. We sinned against an infinitely holy God, which means each one of our sins was an infinite offense.

And the total number of this infinitely bad sins we committed is staggering – when you consider all the

- things we did that we shouldn't have done
- things said that we shouldn't have said
- thoughts that we shouldn't have thought
- wrong motives
- mixed motives
- acts in selfishness, pride
- times we failed to show love to others
- times we failed to love God with all our heart
- times we failed to do the good we knew we should do
- violations of conscience

Every one of those an infinite offense worthy of eternal punishment. We were by nature objects of wrath. Hell was the proper place for us. It's where we truly belonged. So the first part of the chapter reminds us we were doomed because of our sin. And here we look at that same truth from a different angle – we were doomed because of exclusion from God's people.

## **Doomed because of exclusion**

### **Our Problem**

The only way out of all that guilt and punishment is through the promises of God. But there is a giant wall that stands between us and those promises. Those promises belong only to Israel. Unless there is some way we can get past that wall that separates us from Israel and their promises and covenants, we have no hope for forgiveness and salvation. Paul makes a similar point at the beginning of Romans 9, where he lists the advantages of Israel. And keep in mind, if these are advantages to the Jews because they are true of Israel, then they are huge problems for us if we are not part of Israel.

Ro.9:4-5

**the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.**

If all that is true of Israel, then none of it is true of non-Israel (Gentiles). And God wants us to remember that.

### **Our 5-part Calamity**

#### **1. Lit you were without Christ.**

The word **Christ** means "Messiah". In order to be saved, you needed a Messiah. But you were not promised a Messiah. Only Israel was. The "Servant" in Isaiah is identified with Israel. The great messianic King would be a descendent of David and reign over Israel. There is one way and one way only out of our sin and condemnation problem, and it's a Messiah who would come along and take up our infirmities and sins and be stricken by God on our behalf, as Isa.53 promises. The only way out of eternal punishment was to have a Messiah come and be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities and take the punishment that can bring us peace so that his wounds we can be healed. Our only chance for forgiveness of sins is for a Messiah to come and be crushed and caused to suffer by God, so His life can be offered on our behalf as a guilt offering.

Isa.53 promises all that, but promises it to Israel. So as natural born Gentiles, we were without any promise of a Messiah.

#### **2. excluded from citizenship in Israel**

Most people's reaction to Eph.2:12, if they are honest, is "so what?" If you're like me, you have very little if any sense of having been in some terrible plight or desperate situation because you were born a Gentile. That's why we need to remember.

At the risk of sounding racist, I need to tell you that it is a terrible thing to be born...Gentile. Let me show you why. From the very beginning it was God's desire to richly bless mankind. The very first thing He did after creating the man and woman was to bless them.

Gn.1:27-28

**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them**

That was His first order of business. He not only wanted to make a good creation, but to do good to that creation. The blessing part of the creation was so important that when God summarized all of Gn.1-2, the entire creation account, in just one sentence later on in ch.5, Here's God's summary:

Gn.5:1-2

**When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "man."**

That's God's summary. He doesn't mention the garden, He doesn't mention the rib, He doesn't mention the trees or the naming of the animals...

But He mentions the blessing. God desired to bless mankind. The problem is, man rebelled against God and subjected himself to God's curse, rather than blessing. And before long, the entire human race (except for one family) was completely wicked and needed to be destroyed. And so God destroyed them, but blessed that one family. As soon as they got out of the ark Gn.9:1 says **Then God blessed Noah and his sons.** And He not only blessed them. He also made a promise to them – a covenant. The promise was that He would never destroy all of humanity again. - which means He would have to do something to prevent all of humanity from going bad again. Somehow He would have to preserve a remnant of faithful people whom He could bless. God didn't want to just bless one family. He wanted to bless people from all over the earth – people from every tribe, nation, people and language. So in ch.12 we see His plan for doing that. In ch.12 the Lord picks out a guy by the name of Abram, and said this to him:

Gn.12:2-3

**"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."**

We learn something very important from that. Now that sin is a reality in the world, there is one way and one way only to receive God's blessing – and it's through Abram (whose name was later changed to Abraham). Outside of God's plan to bless the whole world through Abraham, there is nothing but judgment, condemnation, wrath and punishment for sin from God. Later we find this plan for blessing comes through Abraham's offspring. But not just any offspring. Only through one of Abraham's grandsons: Jacob. Jacob's name was changed to Israel. So if you were a descendent of Jacob, you were part of the nation of Israel. So the upshot is blessing can only come if you are part of Israel. As time went on throughout the Old Testament, God kept adding to His covenants and promises to Israel. He promised land and further blessings, and most importantly He promised them salvation through a Messiah who would rule them and care for them and take care of their sin.

That's brings us to the third part of our problem:

### **3. and foreigners to the covenants of the promise**

That refers to the covenants in general in which God made promises to Israel. He didn't make any promises to Gentiles. Once Israel had developed into a full-blown nation, God raised up Moses and gave them the Mosaic Law, which had the whole ceremonial and sacrificial system designed to prepare them for the Messiah. During that time the only way to find blessing was through adherence to the hundreds of regulations in that Law. Following those ceremonial regulations is what made you a part of Israel, and if you were not part of Israel, you could forget about salvation or blessing from God. And so part of what that law did was to draw stark distinctions between Jews and Gentiles – things like the food they ate, the days they observed, circumcision, and the way they worshipped.

God made very clear distinctions between those inside the category of people He would bless and those outside. That's why when Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman He said, **salvation is from the Jews.** (John 4:22). People today think they can just decide to worship God and be saved whenever they please and on whatever terms they please. You can't just decide to have God's blessings. Outside of God's promising them to you, there is no way to get them. It's like the courts in the Temple. You can't just decide to have access to a nearer court. Farthest from the presence of God was the Court of the Gentiles, then the Jews, then the men, then the priests, then the Holy Place, then the Holy of Holies. So if you were a non-priest, you couldn't just decide to approach the Holy Place. That illustrates the fact that it's God and God alone who determines what proximity you will be able to have to Him.

So we were without a promise of a Messiah, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants and promises...

#### 4. without hope

Not just without messianic hope – we were without any kind of hope. As unbelievers, the only hope we had was imaginary. We had no legitimate expectation or chance of future blessing, forgiveness of sins, resurrection from the dead, or a favorable afterlife. There was no basis for believing our lives had any meaning or were going anywhere or accomplishing anything worthwhile. Nothing was promised to us except judgment, and we had nothing to look forward to but eternal punishment for our sins. We all know what it's like to lose sight of your hope. That's called depression. But back when we were Gentiles we hadn't just lost sight of hope – we didn't *have* any hope. Any anticipation of anything good was a fantasy – because of #5.

#### 5. and without God in the world.

The word translated **without God** is *atheos* (we get our word “atheist” from it). It means “no God.” It doesn't mean we didn't believe in God. It means for us, in our former lives, there really was no God. God existed, but not in favorable relation to us. We might have offered Him prayers, but He didn't listen to them. We might have offered Him worship, but He didn't accept it. We might have thought we were following after Him, but we were following an illusion. We might have thought He was guiding us through life, but really we were wandering aimlessly. We were without God in the world. And the phrase **in the world** makes it even more fearful. It wasn't just that God couldn't be seen from where you were. For you, God was nowhere to be found in the world. You were lost in this world – this scary, dangerous, vast world – you were all alone, without God. Before your conversion, you were like a little toddler lost deep in the forest, far from home. And you may have imagined your father was there with you or that home was right around the corner, but that was a fantasy. The only thing that was around the corner was wild animals and every conceivable danger. And no matter what kind of effort you made to try to save yourself, it would be fruitless and the only thing in store for you was pain and sorrow followed by destruction and death.

No hope. No Christ. No promises. No belonging. No God.

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That was our plight. And that's what God wants you to take pains to remember. And our only hope was to somehow gain citizenship in Israel and to somehow come within the covenants and promises.

### God's Solution: Brought Near

**13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near<sup>1</sup> through bloodshed - the bloody death of Christ.**

This is one of those blessed “but now”s. We saw that in v.4, and here it is again. There is a clear distinction between before and now. There are no shades of difference between “not-Christian” and “Christian.” You don't grow gradually from one into the other. If there was never a moment in time when you were radically transformed and born all over again, you aren't a Christian – you're still afar off, without God.

Becoming a Christian is a lot like getting married. An hour before the wedding you are completely single. An hour after you are completely married. You might feel really close to each other before the wedding, but that doesn't make you married. And you may feel really distant and estranged after the wedding, but that doesn't make you single. That's the way it is when you become a Christian. It's an event that takes place in a moment of time, that changes your relationship to God and is a reality that transcends how you feel.

There are a lot of different words we use to describe that moment of crossing over from being far away to being near:

- conversion
- getting saved
- being born again
- trusting Jesus Christ

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<sup>1</sup> All the commentators but one (WBC) agree this is an allusion to Isa.57:19 **I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, 19 creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to those far and near," says the LORD. "And I will heal them.**" If so, it's interesting, because Isa.57 is talking about Jews. Those far away were the exiled Jews and those near were the ones in Palestine. So if Paul is quoting that it would serve as an implicit statement that Gentiles are like the exiled Jews – far away, but still favored by God.

- accepting Jesus Christ
- giving your heart to the Lord

But they all refer to that same moment. The moment you place your full faith in Jesus Christ, repent of your past life of sin and turn your back on it, and commit your life to Him completely as your God. “What if I don’t remember when my conversion was?” That’s fine. As long as it happened. But if it never happened, you are in serious peril. And it can happen only through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now, through the death of Christ, all the problems of v.12 are reversed. Instead of being **without Christ** you are now **in Christ**. Through the Jewish Messiah you have been made a citizen of Israel and so now you are in on the promises and the covenants. Your utterly hopeless condition has now been changed, and you have all hope – the expectation of every good thing. And instead of being without God in the world you are near to Him and He is near to you. He is your God, and you are His child, and His commands are written on your heart.

## **The Price for Peace (Blood)**

But it could only happen through bloodshed. You may have noticed I inserted a couple words when I read v.13. I used the word “bloodshed”. How did that strike you? Does that seem kind of extreme to you? We get so used to throwing around the phrase “the blood of Jesus” I think sometimes we forget what it means. It’s not just talking about the red fluid. It’s talking about bloodshed – a violent, bloody death. It wouldn’t have been enough for Jesus to just have a heart attack or die in His sleep. His death had to be brutal enough to properly illustrate what was going on spiritually – He was bearing the guilt of all the sin of all humanity. He was actually suffering the wrath of God. I told you before that every single one of our sins is an infinite offense worthy of eternity in hell. You can think of God’s wrath as being like a giant, raging river – a huge, massive river of wrath for every single sin that’s ever been committed. And yet sinners sin and suffer no immediate consequence. That’s because there is a dam holding back all those millions of raging rivers. The name of the dam is “Mercy”. Every once in a while God dipped the tip of His finger in that infinite reservoir of wrath and dropped a drip on humanity to remind them of the seriousness of sin. He dropped a drip of it on Sodom and Gomorrah and they were instantly destroyed in a hail of fire from heaven. Every person died. Another drop landed on the world of Noah’s time and wiped out every human being except Noah’s family. Those were samples of God’s wrath, but mostly it was dammed up behind the dam of mercy. Well that dam broke on Jesus Christ on the cross. We have no way of comprehending how exactly, but on the cross Jesus Christ endured punishment that was the equivalent of all the suffering in hell of all people for all eternity.

I don’t know what all took place in the spiritual world, but what we could see in the physical realm had to properly illustrate what was actually going on spiritually. We were estranged from God, and now have been brought near to Him by means of bloodshed – the bloody death of Jesus Christ on the cross. And that blood speaks to us. “The blood speaks?” Yes.

Heb 12:24

**You have come...to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.**

What does it mean to talk about blood speaking? What does it say? Let’s look and see.

Gn.4:10

**The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.**

Abel’s blood cried out for justice and vengeance and punishment. What does Jesus’ blood say? It speaks of pardon, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace with God. But before we can participate in that something has to happen. There is a prerequisite, before we can be included in Israel’s blessings, something has to be done to get us past that wall that divides us. V.13 says we have been brought near through Jesus’ bloody death, but how did His death fix our problem? And why does it say we *used* to be Gentiles? Does that mean we have become Jews?

## **The Church**

Here we begin to delve into one of the most central themes of Ephesians: the formation of the Church. The Church is an amazing reality. It's my earnest prayer that by the time we get through Ephesians each of us will have a greater love and appreciation for the Church.

#### **14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one**

God's solution to the whole problem was not to make us Jews or make the Jews Gentiles. Instead He made a completely new category: one new body. And this new body does not contain Jews or Gentiles. The Church is not a coalition of Jews and Gentiles. Those distinctions are now erased.

### **The Prerequisite for Peace: The Wall**

**and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.**

The wall of division was the Law. That was set in place on purpose by God's design to be a wall of separation. God gave so many rules for every detail of Jewish life that there was no way a Jew could ever fit into another culture. So the division was by God's design, but the hostility was wrong. God did intend for the Law to set the Jews apart from the world, but He did not desire that that be a point of hostility. But it was. The Jews saw themselves as the privileged, and so they had disdain for the Gentiles. We tend to do the same thing. All too often we look down our noses at unbelievers, as if our spiritual privileges were our doing. We imagine that we enjoy God's blessings because we were smart enough to become Christians, and the world is lost because they are too dumb to turn to Christ. We forget about the fact that it's only by grace that we are saved.

The same thing happened to the Jews. So the wall of separation became a wall of hostility – like the Berlin Wall used to be. So Jesus destroyed that wall by abolishing the Law. Now, it's important that you understand that's not talking about the whole law. Later in this very book Paul will be urging us to fulfill the moral part of the law (love). The wall was specifically the ceremonial law. And that wall is illustrated by the wall in the Temple separating the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the women (show overhead). That wall was called the *soreg*. There were 13 entrances from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the women, and at each entrance was a tablet written in Greek and Latin warning Gentiles about the consequences of entering. Two of those original tablets have been found, a complete one and a fragment. The complete one reads "No foreigner is to enter within the forecourt and the balustrade around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his subsequent death" (Schürer *HJP*<sup>2</sup> 2:222, n. 85; cf. 285, n. 57).<sup>2</sup> That's what you call a wall of hostility. "Pass beyond this wall and you die." That *soreg* illustrates a lot of things. It illustrates the fact that Gentiles were far off and separated from God (your proximity to the Holy of Holies illustrates your proximity to God). And it also illustrates the hostility between Jew and Gentile – hostility directed even against Gentiles who wanted to come and worship. And it's interesting not only because it illustrates the point of this passage, but I think it's likely that Paul had that wall in mind when he wrote this. Skip down a few verses to the beginning of ch.3.

Eph.3:1

**For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles...**

Paul was a prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles. What does that mean? One thing we can say is that the way Paul became a prisoner had to do with the *soreg*. Let's look back at how Paul ended up getting arrested in the first place.

Acts 21:27-29

**When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, 28 shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." 29(They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.)**

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<sup>2</sup>Freedman, David Noel, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday) 1997, 1992.

They accused Paul of bringing those men beyond the *soreg*. I doubt he did. But you can see how Paul was indeed in prison for the sake of the Gentiles, and it was because of the hostility connected with that wall of division that he was in prison. So Paul, as he sits there in prison writing this epistle, is acutely aware of that dividing wall of hostility between the Jews and Gentiles. What is the wall? It's not the *soreg*. As I said, the *soreg* just illustrates it. He tells us what the wall is. It's the **law with its commandments and regulations**. (lit. **the law of commands in regulations**) He uses three terms to specify the individual commandments and rules as opposed to the law as a whole. And the word **destroyed** (v.14) and **abolishing** (v.15) are both strong terms. It doesn't say that He altered it, or mitigated it or softened it. He smashed it to pieces and obliterated it. He cancelled it and did away with it completely. If you want a detailed study of how that fits with the statements in the OT about the Law being eternal, and Jesus' statements about not one letter being removed, get tape 51 from the Hermeneutics class. For now I'll just say it's not the Old Testament Scriptures Jesus abolished. It was the ceremonial aspects of the Law – the rituals and ceremonies that separated Jew and Gentile... - such as circumcision, the sacrificial system, Temple worship, observance of special days, etc. All that is gone – abolished. For the superficial, legalistic Jews, that's pretty upsetting, because for them, that's all there is to their religion. If that part's abolished, there's nothing left.

Ro.3:31

**Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.**

The ceremonial law is long gone, but that was never the heart of the issue with the Law anyway. The heart of the Law (Love God with all your heart) remains in tact. But the ceremonial part is no longer binding on anyone.

**His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,**

Now that's real peace. If you take two people and bring them together – remove the wall from in between and get rid of the hostility, that's one thing... But to make them one person – that's real unity. The Jews had been looking forward to a Messiah who would bring peace – but not this kind of peace. When they read all the OT promises about a Prince of Peace who would someday come, they were thinking that just meant Gentiles wouldn't bother them anymore. But Jesus was more concerned about bringing peace by putting to death their hostility against the Gentiles. But this still leaves a lot of questions unanswered. I told you before our only hope was to be included in Israel, because salvation is only for Israel. But Paul is not talking about us Gentiles getting circumcised and becoming Jews. In fact, v.16 brings up another twist:

## **The Plan for Peace: the Church**

The Jews Were Also Estranged

**16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.**

He says both were reconciled, which implies both needed to be reconciled, which means the Jews were also estranged from God. Is it required that a person be part of Israel to be saved? Yes. But here we see "Israel" is not fundamentally an ethnic entity. Most of the Jews aren't even part of true Israel. So, if God made all those promises of salvation for Israel in the OT, how is it that even the Jews can't be saved unless they are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ? If God made all those promises to Israel, but then most Jews today are lost, doesn't that mean God's Word failed? That's the burning question in Romans 9.

Rom 9:4-9

**the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. 6 It is not as though God's word had failed.**

How's that?

***For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.***

He goes on to explain that even as far back as Abraham, it was only those who believe who are part of true Israel.



Ro.2:28-29

**A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.**

God made this crystal clear in the OT.

Dt.10:16

**Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.**

Dt.30:2-6

**when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, 3 then...6 The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.**

Jer.9:25-26

**"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh-- 26 Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the desert in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart."**

Jer.4:4

**Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done--burn with no one to quench it.**

He makes the point again in Ro.4:1-12

From the mouth of no less than David himself:

**8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." 9 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. 10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!**

Circumcision, or physical, ethnic Jewishness isn't what saves someone, because Abraham was saved before there was such a thing as circumcision.

Gal.6:15-16

**Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. 16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.**

Our only hope was to gain citizenship in Israel – but not ethnic Israel, the true Israel of God.

Gal. 3:29

**If you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise**

The Christians in the first century used to say there is now three races of people: Jews, Gentiles and the Church.

## **Conclusion: how to remember?**

- 1) *Pray.* Ask God to make your heart sensitive and to grant you the ability to be moved by the truth.
- 2) *Meditate.* It's not enough to just nod your head in agreement when you hear me talk about your former plight. Then *ponder* the realities of your existence without Christ -- unassuaged guilt, meaningless existence, omnipotent justice against you, and eternal punishment in hell. Lay the Scriptures before you and skip no verses.
- 3) Let the suffering of this life help you.

When you see the misery of the world, physical suffering, disease, starvation, child abuse, emotional suffering, birth defects – or any other kind of suffering, and say, “What I deserved, and what I had coming was much worse than that.” Doing that will enable you to love God more deeply. And it will do something else as well. It will help you understand that the real issue isn’t us – it’s God. When you realize how undeserving we were of salvation, you are reminded that God did it for His own glory.

Ezekiel 20:42-44

**And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country which I swore to give to your fathers. And there you shall remember your ways and all the doings with which you have polluted yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils you have committed. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel, says the Lord God.**

When we remember our sin and unworthiness, we are reminded that God saved us for His own purposes and His own name sake, and so we exalt His name.

Benediction Eph 4:17-24

**So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.**

**20 You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

### **Review Questions:**

1. Why is it so important for us to remember our past condition?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In what sense was the Law abolished, and in what sense is it still binding on us?