

New Humanity in Christ (II)

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[0 : 00] Well, now we come to the reading of God's Word. And let's turn to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 2. And if you have one of our big hardback Bibles, you'll find that on page 976.

Page 976. I know that Terry will be particularly speaking from verses 11 to 22, but he's asked me to read the whole chapter so that we can get the flow of the Apostle Paul's thinking.

So Ephesians, chapter 2, beginning at verse 1. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved, and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. 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, 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.

[2 : 24] But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have 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 members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Amen. This is the word of the Lord and a great passage it is.

I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me again to Ephesians chapter 2, which you will find in page 976 of the Pew Bible. 976.

[4 : 09] And as you do so, let me say a word of prayer. Make the book lift to us, O Lord. Show us yourself within thy word.

God, show us ourselves and show us our Savior and make the book lift to us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Recently, I was visiting a lady from the church and she'd been a nurse in a missionary hospital in Kenya for three years in the late 50s and the early 60s.

And after these three years, she then moved to serve in another missionary hospital in South Africa. And she spent another three years there in South Africa during the middle 60s.

And this was during the apartheid. And this lady witnessed firsthand how people were brutally treated all because of the colour of their skin.

It's hard to imagine how oppressed a black South African must have felt during 1948 to 1994 when the system of apartheid was legally enforced.

[5 : 21] If you're not already aware, apartheid meant that if you were black, you were provided separate services to white people, all of which were inferior. If you were black, you attended a different school.

If you attended school at all. If black, you had different medical care. If any medical care at all. In fact, some public services wouldn't be available to you at all.

There were beaches that you couldn't go on, drinking taps that you couldn't drink from, and churches you couldn't attend. If we asked a black person living under apartheid to describe what it was like, they would probably speak about the awfulness, the awfulness of separation and alienation, and the shame of being a stranger to everything that was good.

We all probably find it extremely difficult to even begin to imagine what living under these horrific conditions must have been like. But in the passage we're looking at together this evening, the Apostle Paul highlights to the church at Ephesus that that was exactly their former spiritual position.

Separated, alienated, and strangers to all that was spiritually good. That was how they were living before the gospel and the grace of God came to them.

[6 : 51] Over the course of this evening and next Sunday, Paul and I, and that's Paul the Brennan, not Paul the Apostle, Paul and I will seek to expound this half of chapter 2 and all of chapter 3.

You may remember, though I doubt it very much, that we done a similar thing a couple of months ago with chapter 1 and the first half of chapter 2. Ephesians is all about the church.

It is the gospel of the church, as one writer put it. And Philip Copeland, who is known to most of us here, was brought up here in this church and spent two years here as an apprentice.

Philip helped me to see that this letter divides into three sections. The first section, the wealth of the church, chapter 1 verse 1 to chapter 3 verse 21.

In this section, Paul unpacks the riches of God's grace that he has showered upon his people. In Christ, they have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

[7 : 56] In this world of darkness that is suffering under the curse of sin and hell, sin and the fall, God is creating a new humanity in Jesus Christ. And God has given his new humanity a name, the church.

And the church consists of those who have been saved from both Jew and Gentile, non-Jewish backgrounds. And are now united as one in Christ.

The grace that God has showered upon them is to shape and to master the way that they live. So the wealth of the church is to shape the walk of the church.

Chapter 4 verse 1 to chapter 6 verse 9. Paul unpacks the moral behavior that comes with being God's new humanity. Christians have already been saved and made alive with Christ.

therefore we are to live like it. Be what you are says Paul. You are already God's children who have been shown immeasurable grace. So now live your life under this new identity.

[9 : 03] Every part of life from public to private from speech to sexuality from life at work to life at home. everything is to be used for God's glory and shaped by his grace.

I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling Paul says. God's new humanity the church is to stand united in Christ and under the word of God.

They are to live distinctly different lives from the world around them because this is part of God's plan. Paul urges them to live this way because it's in the everyday relationships of church life that God's people face the attacks of the power of darkness.

In the great climax of the letter Paul describes the warfare of the church. That great passage about the armour of God. The armour of God is the gospel of Jesus Christ both applied to our belief and our behaviour.

We are to put on the full armour of God to put on the gospel so that you can take your stand against the devil schemes. The wealth of the church the walk of the church and the warfare of the church.

[10 : 22] It's good stuff isn't it? You should text Philip Coatland or send him an email and encourage him. Well we are still very much in that first section of the letter.

The wealth of the church. In chapter one Paul has outlined the spiritual privileges of the church in Christ. The past privilege of election in Christ.

Chapter 1 verse 4 to 6. Before the foundation of the world. Before creation. Before time existed. To when God only himself existed. God did something.

He chose us in Christ. Totally undeserving as we are. He chose us that we should be holy and blameless before him. The past privilege of election.

The present privilege of adoption. Verse 5 to 8 of chapter 1. God has adopted us as his children through Jesus Christ. And through Jesus Christ we have been redeemed through his blood.

[11 : 22] We have been forgiven according to the riches of his grace which he has lavished upon us. Past privilege. present privilege. But also future privilege of unification.

Verse 9 and 10 of chapter 1. God has made known to us the mystery of his will for the future. His plan. His purpose which he has set forth in Christ.

A plan for the fullness of time to unite all things. All things in Christ. Things in heaven and things in the earth. And the scope of this unification is outlined in verses 11 to 14.

These privileges, these blessings belong equally to Jewish believers and to Gentile believers. People who are not Jews. And this theme is picked up in chapter 2.

Having outlined our spiritual privileges in Christ, Paul now in chapter 2 goes on to outline our spiritual position in Christ. Chapter 2 falls into two halves.

[12 : 27] Two halves that outline two great realities that God has accomplished for his people, his church, his new humanity in Christ. In verses 1 to 10 of chapter 2, God has made alive in Christ those who were dead.

God has made one in Christ those who were divided. In verses 11 to 22, God has made one in Christ those who were divided, Jew and Gentile, non-Jew, together, making one new people of God, the new humanity in Christ.

Our focus this evening will be the second half of chapter 2, and so under our consideration this evening are verses 11 to 22, God making one in Christ those who were divided.

In this half of chapter 2, the apostle Paul tells the Ephesians that separation, alienation and being strangers to all of God's covenant promises was their position before they heard the gospel and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul does in this section we're looking at this evening what he did in verses 1 to 3 of chapter 2. He again reminds the Ephesians of their former condition, who they were and what they were before they became Christians.

[13 : 55] As we saw last time, Paul doesn't do this to make the Ephesians feel bad about themselves. He isn't one of those people who likes to say to others, remember who and what you are for the purpose of keeping them down.

No, Paul reminds them of their former condition. He knows that if they failed to grasp the awfulness of life outside of Christ, they would never grasp and enjoy how privileged they were in Christ.

And where this was the case for the Ephesians, so too is the case for us. Unless we remember what we once were, we will never fully appreciate what we are now.

Paul follows the same pattern as the first half of chapter 2. He reminds the Ephesians of what life was like, what happened, and what life is like now.

And this could be summed up in three words. What life was like, alienation. What happened, reconciliation. And what life is like now, unification.

[15 : 01] So firstly, we have in verses 11 and 12, the Gentiles terrible plight, alienation. The Gentiles terrible plight, alienation.

If you look at verse 11, Paul reminds them that before trusting in Jesus, they had nothing to mark or identify them as belonging to or knowing God.

They went like the Jews who had the covenant mark of circumcision. the outward sign which identified them as God's people. And although Paul points out in verse 11, circumcision was only an external sign done in the body by the hands of men, it was more than the Gentiles had.

With respect to God, Gentiles had nothing. In verse 12, he mentions five consequences of what this meant for them. And every consequence meant that they were without something.

They were without something. Firstly, the Ephesians former position meant that they were without Christ. At that time, they were separate from Christ.

[16 : 13] That is, they were formerly Christless. The Ephesians worshipped the goddess Diana. Before coming to the gospel, they knew nothing about Christ. Unlike the Jews, they had no thought, no expectation, salvation, and no hope of a coming Messiah.

And this too is the position we were in before hearing in the gospel what God had done in Christ. Remember back to when we had no comprehension of who Jesus was and what Jesus had done.

Think how empty and meaningless life was then. I remember it only too well. I was a young man, I knew I was empty, wishing something or someone might come along and change things.

Like those in Ephesus, I had no hope, no thought, and no expectation of a Savior. I wasn't waiting on a Christ. In fact, the only Christ I ever heard about was the one whose name my parents cursed daily.

And sadly, this is the story for most in our city today. Without Christ, separate from Christ, Christless, the only time they hear his name, the only time they use his name, is when it's been used as a curse word.

[17 : 33] Try to think of the Ephesians listening to Paul's letter being read out. And as it got to the bit about the former state being separate from Christ, they must have been so grateful that Paul had come to their city and shared the gospel.

Paul's preaching of the gospel took them from being sinners in Ephesus, separate from Christ, in chapter 2, verse 12. To chapter 1, verse 1. Saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ.

And this is what God is still doing today in the lives of many who hear the gospel. They go about day to day without a gospel and without any expectation of a Messiah who could save them.

Then the word of faith comes to them. The gospel is shared and they go from separation from Christ to being the faithful in Christ. Perhaps that's something that will happen in the life of someone here this evening.

I so hope so. The second consequence Paul mentions in verse 12 about the Ephesians position before becoming Christians is they were without citizenship, without citizenship, alienated from the commonwealth, the citizenship in Israel.

[18 : 45] This is an odd statement and we might be wondering what it means. Well, it's a statement that means exactly what it says in the text. As Gentiles, the Ephesians were excluded from the nation to whom God had revealed himself.

Remember back to Genesis 12 when God called Abraham, the father of the faith. He called him to go to a land that I will show you and I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and I will make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth are in your seed. All the families of the earth shall be blessed.

And Abraham's seed, Abraham's offspring were the Jews, the nation of Israel. God also gave them his laws and his blessing. Israel was God's nation in a way that was not true of any Gentile, non-Jewish nation.

Gentile nations were without citizenship, alienated from the common wealth of Israel. The third consequence, they were without covenants, without covenants.

[19 : 59] They were strangers to the covenants of the promise. The plural covenants here indicates that as Gentiles, the Ephesians were foreigners not just to one, but to all the covenants God made.

The covenant with Abraham, his covenant with Moses, his covenant with David. As Gentiles, the Ephesians knew nothing about any of this.

One commentator puts it like this, these covenants were for Hebrew ears. Gentiles didn't belong to the privileged people and generally speaking, they didn't even know God had made such promises.

They were alienated strangers. While the blessing of the Gentiles is included in God's covenant with Abraham, that in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Although this was true, that the blessing of God would come to the Gentile nations, God, however, did not make any direct covenants with the Gentile nations.

[20 : 59] The Gentiles were aliens, strangers, and the Jews never let them forget it. Many of the Pharisees would pray daily, O God, I give you thanks that I am a Jew and not a Gentile.

What a position the Ephesians were in before Paul brought them the gospel. In relation to God, they were ignorant and had nothing. Let me emphasize this again.

This is where most people in our city are at this moment in time. Even though lots of folks in this city have Catholic or Protestant backgrounds, they are separate from Christ, alienated from citizenship in Israel, strangers to the covenants of the promise.

And the result of all of this, in verse 12, where Paul says the result is without hope, without hope. Where most people in Glasgow would need the first three consequences spelt out to them, I am sure they would fully understand what without hope means and feels like.

These words without hope, one commentator says, what profoundly empty words. Is there a better way of describing life without Jesus? Engulfed in despair, hopeless.

[22 : 16] The only hope there is, is tomorrow might bring something better than today. But the reality is, we know that it won't, because we hoped for the same thing yesterday, and it made no difference.

This is people's lives. We live among many who are hopeless. And if we're sitting here this evening and we don't know Jesus Christ as Lord, we'll know this describes our lives.

Without hope in life, without hope in death. In verse 12, the fifth consequence, without God, without God, Paul wants us to see that having no hope in life and in death is a direct result of being without God in this world.

Absolutely desperate. And it's not that the Ephesians, or the Gentiles for that matter, didn't have any gods. Oh, they had gods aplenty. It was said that in Athens it was easier to find a god than it was to find a man.

But the Gentiles, no matter how religious, no matter how moral they were, they did not know the one true God. And it's just worth noting that the spiritual plight of the Gentiles then, and unbelievers today, is not caused by God.

[23 : 38] It's caused by our own willful sin. Anyone who is without God is also without excuse. As Paul writes in the book of Romans, we all know that the true God exists, but we deliberately refuse to honor him.

And this is what he writes in Romans chapter 1. Men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. Paul tells the Ephesians to remember that this was the life without Jesus, Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, godless.

Only as we think about what we've looked at in the first three verses of chapter 2 and verses 11 and 12 of chapter 2, will what's written in verse 8 of chapter 2 be meaningful. By grace you have been saved.

[24 : 54] The only reason the Ephesians' terrible plight changed is through what Christ done for us at Calvary, which is what Paul says in verse 13, but now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near.

How have we been brought near? By trying our best, by being good, by coming to the church and getting on all the rotors, by being baptized, by being evangelicals and holding all the right doctrines and all the right confessions.

No, we have been brought near to God, into his covenant community, where we can enjoy all his covenant promises through the blood of Jesus alone.

Paul wants us to see that it cost Jesus everything for us to receive everything. He gave his life so that we might have life.

Paul's already mentioned Jesus' blood in verse 7 of chapter 1, saying, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. Without the blood of Christ poured out for us on the cross, without him dying in our place, we have no hope.

[26 : 10] We stand unforgiven before a holy and just God. However, when we claim the blood of Christ, when we look to the cross and recognize what Jesus did was on behalf of my sins, and that this is my only defense before God, only then can we draw near to God.

Look what Paul says in verse 12 of chapter 3, through Christ we have boldness and access to God with confidence through faith in Jesus. In Christ Jesus, we who were once far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

As Paul goes on from looking at the Gentiles' terrible plight, alienation, he now moves to the gospel's transforming power, reconciliation.

The gospel's transforming power, reconciliation. The gospel has achieved reconciliation for those who knew alienation.

And Paul writes that God's purpose in all of this was to bring about peace. Some of you will remember the words of the then British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, when he returned from conferences in Germany in 1938.

[27 : 28] Peace in our time, he cried. Peace with honour. He was sure he had stopped Adolf Hitler. Yet one year later, Hitler invaded Poland. And in September 3rd, 1939, Great Britain declared war in Germany.

Chamberlain's great peace mission had failed. And it seems so has the peace mission for Ukraine this week as well, has failed.

And that's what Paul is saying here. Peace in our time. Peace in our time is possible. Peace in our time is happening. Because unlike Chamberlain, Christ Jesus' peace mission did not fail.

In fact, verse 14, he himself is our peace. Friends, just read that again and let that sink in. He himself is our peace.

Our peace is not found in a signed document. It's not won by politicians. Our peace is in a person. Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

[28 : 32] He himself is our peace. And there are two strands to this peace that Christ Jesus brings. First of all, God makes peace through Christ's cross between himself and us.

As Romans chapter 5 verse 1 says, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 16 of chapter 2, Jesus might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility, creating peace.

However, Paul's emphasis in chapter 2 isn't only peace between God and man through the cross. His emphasis here is peace between Jew and Gentile, brought about through Christ's death and the cross.

Jesus himself is our peace, we are told in verse 14. But one of the main purposes of this peace was to make us both one and has broken down in its flesh the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile.

Christ's purpose in dying, verse 15, was that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace. And this is an astonishing statement when we think of the hatred that existed between Jew and Gentile in the first century world.

[29 : 58] I wonder if we're aware how much the Jews hated the Gentiles. Here are some examples. Jews believed that God created the Gentiles for one purpose, as fuel for the fires of hell.

Other records tell us that if a Gentile woman was struggling and in labor, Jews were told not to aid her. Why? Because they were only bringing another heathen dog into the world.

And it wasn't one way hatred. No, not one way. We need only read recent history to discover how much Gentiles hate Jews. Back to that second world war, six million Jews were exterminated.

Just recently in our news, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Jews' liberation from the death camp in Auschwitz. And this hatred toward Jews is not something confined only to the past.

Reports just this week have informed others. The anti-Semitic attacks in Great Britain have doubled in the past year. There have always been astonishing levels of hatred between both groups.

- [31 : 13] But then Jesus comes along and Jesus gives up his life, not just for Jew and not just for Gentile, but for sinners.

And the result, Jewish sinners and Gentile sinners, both of whom, verse 17 says, need peace preached to them. The two become one body, the body of Christ.

And we're told in verse 18, both have access through Jesus to the Father by one spirit. Only through Jesus, who, verse 15 says, in his flesh has abolished the law of commandments and ordinances, only through Jesus can Jew and Gentile be reconciled to one another.

But more importantly, only through Jesus, we're told in verse 16, can Jew and Gentile be reconciled to God. And that's wonderful news for the Ephesians, who were far off and have now been brought near.

But for a Jew, it would be quite hard to stomach, quite hard to get your head around. Paul has already said that the Ephesians were without Christ, without citizenship, without covenants, without hope, without God.

- [32 : 36] But the Jews, listen to what Paul says about the Jews in Romans chapter 9, they are the Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, as the Christ, came the Messiah, Jesus, who is God over all, blessed forever.

Amen. They were a people of great privilege, but the fulfillment of all these privileges was Christ. All these were merely shadowing Christ, pointing forth unto Him.

and Jew, just like Gentile, needed Christ. There would be no two-tier Christianity. Christ has reconciled both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And through Him, we both, or we all, have access in one spirit to the Father. I don't think we have Jews and Gentiles here this evening.

- [33 : 51] I think we're all probably Gentiles, non-Jews. But there are some of us here who have had extremely privileged upbringings, just like the Jews. We've been raised with parents who are Christians.

We have been brought along to church all the days of our lives. We've sat under the teaching of the Word and the preaching of the Gospel. But the way for you to be part of God's family is exactly the same way as the atheist who comes in off the street.

The same way as the unchurched drug addict who comes to Toronto too. And the same as maybe one of our Iranian brothers with a Muslim background who comes to the church.

The way is the same for all through Christ. Jesus Christ is a great leveler for men. Paul wants the Ephesians to remember these things.

He's telling them at one time as Gentiles they had a terrible plight, alienation. But all this changed because of the Gospel's transforming power, bringing reconciliation for them in Christ.

- [35 : 06] But Paul now ends chapter 2 in verses 19 to 22 by pointing them to God's tremendous purpose, unification. God's tremendous purpose, unification.

C.S. Lewis once said that the church was not a show home but a building site. And these verses at the end of chapter 2 would seem to back up what Lewis said.

We have a building work of our own going on here at the church nearing completion. And at the moment and having an architect like Kenny Stephen on the job with his plans and drawings and fine eye for details has been a tremendous benefit in making one building of the two.

But God's plans and purposes of unification are even more tremendous. Look back to verse 12. These Gentiles were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, godless.

But look at the building work that's been going on amongst them. Look at verse 19. So then, you are no longer, so then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but verse 15, one new man.

[36 : 30] Verse 16, one body. Verse 19, one nation. Gentiles are now fellow citizens.

Verse 19, one family, members of the household of God. And verses 20 to 22, one temple. What a tremendous purpose God has in Christ.

Unification. And what he's doing in the church, he will do in the whole cosmos. He will unite all things, all things in heaven and all things in earth in Christ.

And this unification happens as we are built on and built by the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, which is the testimony, their testimony of and about Christ Jesus, the word of God, Christ Jesus who himself is the cornerstone.

and as we continue to grow and mature in Christ, we are joined together. We grow together into a holy temple in the Lord's and we are also being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

[37 : 42] Wow. Did you know that that's what was happening when we meet together and we grow together? Gives you a different view of church, doesn't it? that we are part of God's tremendous purpose of unification.

That's why we all need to be here. Being a Christian is a team game. It's not an individual sport. That's why we need to be here under the world being shaped and molded and changed as we're built and shaped and joined and grow together to make this temple God's tremendous purpose of unification.

So friends, Paul wants us to remember our terrible plight as Gentiles. We were alienated from God. But because of the gospel's transforming power, we have been reconciled to God and to each other.

And he wants us to remember also that we are part of God's tremendous purpose, unification for the whole cosmos in Christ. But before we leave chapter 2 of Ephesians, just a word.

Paul has outlined to us that God has made us alive in Christ, those who were dead in sin. And he has made one in Christ, those who were divided. Outside of Christ, nothing but death and division.

[39 : 06] But in him and through him, we can know life. We can know peace. unity with God.

Isn't it a wonderful thing to be a Christian? Let us pray. Let us pray. Therefore, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Father, we thank you for bestowing on people like us tremendous privileges like these. We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.