

# “Peace with God”

(Ephesians 2:11-22 ~ Part 1)

## Introduction

➤ Every unbeliever is at enmity with God – whether they are profanely, violently, or militantly atheistic, or morally, quietly, and passively idolatrous. The sinful heart is in rebellion toward the holy God, and the unrepentant sinner has declared war against God Almighty. From the Fall of Adam (Gen.3), sinful mankind has been in mutiny against God; defying God’s commands, rebuffing God’s love, profaning God’s name, defying God’s Word, and rebelling against His will. This was, and is, and unprovoked attack on God.

**James 4:4** ~ “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity [*echthra*] with God?”

**John 15:23** ~ “Whoever hates me hates my Father also.” (1Jn.2:23)

**Rom 8:6-8** ~ “For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to [*echthra*; or “*is enmity against*” (ΚΙΥ)] God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Rom.1:30; 5:10; Col.1:21)

✓ Illust: “‘The carnal mind,’ he says, ‘it is ENMITY against God. He uses a noun and not an adjective. He does not say it is opposed to God merely, but it is positive enmity. It is not black, but blackness. It is not at enmity, but enmity itself. It is not corrupt, but corruption. It is not rebellious, it is rebellion. It is not wicked, it is wickedness itself. The heart, though it be deceitful, is positively deceit. It is evil in the concrete, sin in the essence. It is the distillation, the quintessence of all things that are vile. It is not envious against God, it is envy. It is not at enmity, it is actual enmity” (C.H.

Spurgeon; sermon “The Carnal Mind Enmity Against God; April 22, 1855).

➤ Consequently, every unbeliever is justly under the wrath of the holy God and would remain there if it were not for God’s loving and merciful grace.

**Eph 2:3** ~ “among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

**John 3:36** ~ “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” (Jn.3:18; Rom.1:18; 2:5; 5:9; Eph.5:6; Col.3:6)

**Ps 7:10** ~ “God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.” (Ps.5:5)

Ps 7:10 ~ “God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.” (NKJV)

➤ This is, without question, the unbeliever’s greatest problem – they are innately sinful, and willfully sin, against God as the expression of their hostile and hateful rejection of Him as God. And God, in righteousness and holiness, responds with just wrath and condemnation. At first glance, this appears to be a matter of irreconcilable differences: God cannot be unjust or unholy, and man cannot become righteous or holy. So, it appears as though God and humans are hopelessly unreconciled – with mankind being hopelessly lost, and eternally and justly condemned by God.

The unbeliever’s greatest need is to be reconciled to God. To be “*reconciled*” (*katallassō*) is the removal of hostility or enmity between two people (or groups). Biblically, with regard to the Gospel, reconciliation is between the holy God and sinful man. As we have seen, throughout our study so far in the book of Ephesians, God graciously made a way for us to be reconciled to Himself – sending His one and only Son to be our one and only Savior!

**Rom 5:1, 10-11** ~ “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ... <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies [*echthros*] we were reconciled [*katallassō*] to

God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled [*katallassō*], shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup>More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation [*katallagē*].”

➤ This reconciliation – or “peace with God” – is the central message of the passage before us this morning. In writing to the (predominantly) Gentile Christians in and around the city of Ephesus (1:1), writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God (2Tim.3:15-17; 2Pet.1:21), the apostle Paul describes how the unbeliever – specifically the Gentile unbeliever – is reconciled to God.

**Eph 2:11-22** ~ “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 – <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup>by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup>and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup>And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup>For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup>built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup>in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup>In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

➤ This long (eleven-verse) passage of Scripture contains only one imperative verb – which often indicates a command (i.e., something that is imperative to do). It is found in the opening verse, translated “*remember*” (vs.11; *mnēmoneuō*) meaning “recall to mind”, “be mindful of”, or even “to memorize” [note: the “*remember*” in verse twelve is added by the translators, not in the original]. Consequently, this imperative verb is a command that runs throughout this entire passage.

➤ With this in mind, I have outlined this passage of Scripture into three major “reminders.”

### I. Remember who you were apart from Christ (vs.11-12)

➤ Christians are exhorted to remember who they were apart from Christ. That is, their utter sinfulness and absolute helplessness. In our verse-by-verse study of Ephesians, we have repeatedly and explicitly seen our sinful depravity.

**Eph 2:1-3** ~ “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

**Jer 2:22** ~ “Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord God.”

**Jer 17:9** ~ “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Jer 17:9 ~ “The human mind is more deceitful than anything else. It is incurably bad. ...” (NET)

**Isa 64:6** ~ “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”

Isa 64:6 ~ “We are all like one who is unclean, all our so-called righteous acts are like a menstrual rag in your sight. ...” (NET)

**Rom 3:10-18, 23** ~ “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup>no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’ <sup>13</sup>Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ <sup>14</sup>Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’ <sup>15</sup>Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup>in their paths are ruin and misery, <sup>17</sup>and the way of peace they have not known.’ <sup>18</sup>There is no fear of God before their eyes.’ ... <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (see Job 25)

**Rom 6:23** ~ “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

- There is a good reason why Paul is belaboring this point. For the sinful depravity of mankind is something that most people refuse to hear, and something that many preachers refuse to preach. Furthermore, even when we do hear this doctrine (and believe it), we still can tend to forget it (falling into deceitful traps of believing ‘people are basically good’, ‘I’ve done a lot of good things’, or ‘I deserve God’s saving grace’). The doctrine of our utterly sinful condition can be difficult for us to hear, and difficult for us to remember. Therefore, we need these biblical reminders.
  - ✓ Illust: “In these verses [Eph.2:11-12], the apostle proceeds in his account of the miserable condition of these Ephesians by nature. ... As if he had said, ‘You should remember what you have been, and compare it with what you now are, in order to humble yourselves and to excite your love and thankfulness to God.’ Note, Converted sinners ought frequently to reflect upon the sinfulness and misery of the state they were in by nature” (Matthew Henry; *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*; Eph.2:11-13).
- In Ephesians 2:11-12, in writing to the (predominantly) Gentile Christians in and around the city of Ephesus, the apostle Paul outlined two truths that they needed to remember.

#### A. Did not belong to God’s people (vs.11)

- Paul immediately reminded his readers that they were not ethnically God’s chosen people; that is, they were Gentiles and not Jews. *“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”* (vs.11). By God’s sovereign redemptive plan, salvation was first for the Jews and then for the Gentiles. Salvation would be extended to the Gentiles as the Jews disobeyed God and rejected the Messiah (Jn.1:11-13; Rom.9:30-33). This would cause the Jews to be jealous, hopefully leading them to repentance (Rom.11:11-14).

**Rom 1:16** ~ “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (see Matt.15:24; Jn.4:22; Rom.9:4-5)

- This clearly does not mean that the Jews were more deserving or worthy of God’s saving grace – for they were clearly not (see Deut.7:6-8). Nor does this mean that the Jews were saved by works, and the Gentiles by grace. Everyone who has ever been saved, and will ever be saved, is saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The Old Testament saints were saved by their faith in the Messiah who was to come, and everyone else is saved by their faith in the Messiah who has come.

**Rom 3:29-31** ~ “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since God is one – who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” (see Rom.2:25-29; 9:6; 11:11)

**Gal 2:15-16** ~ “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup>yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

**Gal 3:26-29** ~ “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup>For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,

there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." (see Rom.4:9-12)

**Gal 5:6** ~ "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."

**Gal 6:15** ~ "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

➤ In highlighting the Gentile ethnicity of the Ephesians, Paul was in no way questioning their salvation. For, in this letter, he has already referred to them as "*saints*" (1:1) and those who "*are faithful in Christ Jesus*" (1:1), and explicitly affirmed their salvation based on their faith in Christ:

**Eph 1:13-14** ~ "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

➤ But the fact remained that they were "originally" not part of God's chosen people. As always, the whole world can be divided into Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). Biblically, Jews were identified by their ancestral lineage (i.e., children of Abraham) and by the physical act of circumcision: "*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*" (vs.11). Circumcision was supposed to be a physical sign of a spiritual reality – that Israel was God's chosen people – that through His people, God would extend salvation to everyone who believed.

Unfortunately, circumcision was seen by some Jews as a sign of their spiritual superiority and meritorious works (Acts 15:1), and seen as abhorrent and ludicrous to many Gentiles. Neither are appropriate responses. For God commanded circumcision for the Jews (Gen.17:12; Lk.2:21; Phil.3:5) as a sign identifying them as God's people, representing God's saving grace to the nations (see Gen.12:3; 19:6).

➤ This is seen in two unique narrative passages in the Gospels.

**John 4:16-26** ~ "Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' <sup>17</sup>The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; <sup>18</sup>for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.' <sup>19</sup>The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our fathers worshiped on this mountain [Mt. Gerazim, Samaria], but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.' <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. <sup>22</sup>You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

<sup>23</sup>But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' <sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.' <sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.'"

Jesus unveiled to this Samaritan woman that salvation is "*from the Jews*" (vs.22) but not only *for* the Jews. [note: literally, Jesus responded to her saying, "I am speaking to you" (vs.26; no "he" in original)]. By God's redemptive plan, God would be able to be worshiped by anyone and in any place.

**Luke 4:28-29** ~ "When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. <sup>29</sup>And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff."

What could Jesus have said (or done) to make people – religious (Jewish) people, not pagans – so enraged that they wanted to, and tried to, throw him off a cliff? In short, He told them that God’s salvation is extended to Gentiles and not just to Jews.

**Luke 4:16-30** ~ “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup>And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup>‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor’ [from Is.61:1-2].

<sup>20</sup>And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup>And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ <sup>22</sup>And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’ <sup>23</sup>And he said to them, ‘Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’ <sup>24</sup>And he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.

<sup>25</sup>But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, <sup>26</sup>and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow [1Kngs.17:8-24]. <sup>27</sup>And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian’ [2Kngs.5]. <sup>28</sup>When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. <sup>29</sup>And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. <sup>30</sup>But passing through their midst, he went away.”

Both the widow of Zarephath (1Kngs.17:8-24) and Naaman the leper from Syria (2Kngs.5) were Gentiles. The thought that God would extend His saving grace to Gentiles was more than the Jews could bear.

➤ The point here, in Ephesians 2:11, is that Paul wanted the Ephesians to remember that (as Gentiles) they were not originally God’s chosen people.

### **B. Did not have God’s salvation (vs.12)**

➤ Consequently, and more importantly, Gentiles were outside of God’s salvation. Since they were not originally a part of God chosen people, Gentiles did not have the salvific blessings and privileges of God (see Rom.3:1-2; 9:3-5). Without God’s saving grace, as is true of everyone, Gentiles were helplessly and hopelessly condemned.

➤ In rapid-fire succession, Paul listed off five dreadful consequences that faced the Gentiles who were outside of God’s saving grace: *“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”* (vs.12). He wanted them to *“remember”* (vs.12) who they were apart from Christ, so that they could rejoice in God’s saving grace.

#### **1. “separated from Christ” (vs.12)**

First, Paul reminded them that they *“were at that time separated from Christ”* (vs.12). The Greek word translated *“separated from”* (*chōris*; vs.12) means “apart from”, “without”, or “outside of” (that is, “apart from Christ”, “without Christ”, or “outside of Christ”). Clearly, without Christ there is no salvation, and having no salvation means that you are without Christ. To put it another way, there is no salvation apart from the Savior.

**John 3:18** ~ “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

**John 3:36** ~ “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

**John 14:6** ~ “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (see Acts 4:12; 1Jn.5:11-12)

**John 15:5** ~ “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

This is still true today: everybody is either saved or unsaved (there is no middle-ground or neutral territory). A person is either with Christ or apart from Christ; for Christ or against Christ; submitting to Christ or rebelling against Christ; saved by Christ or condemned by Christ; in Christ or “*separated from Christ*” (vs.12).

✓ Illust: “There is nothing more terrible that can be said about anybody than this – ‘without Christ’ ... But on the other hand there is nothing more wonderful than to be ‘in Christ.’ These are the New Testament terms – ‘in Christ’, ‘outside Christ.’ Those are the only two positions that matter. We are all of us either ‘in Christ’ or else ‘outside Christ.’ Do you know exactly where you are? This is not theory; this is actual fact and experience. This is the thing that is going to determine our eternal destiny” (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones; *An Exposition of Ephesians*; vol.2, p.168).

## 2. “*alienated from the commonwealth of Israel*” (vs.12)

Second, Paul reminded them that they (as Gentiles) were “*alienated from the commonwealth of Israel*” (vs.12). This is essentially what we studied in verse eleven. The word “*commonwealth*” (*politeia*) could be translated “citizenship” in that Gentiles were “*alienated from*” (*apallotrioō*; estranged) God’s chosen nation. In verse nineteen, Paul referred to Gentiles as “*strangers and aliens*” which means that they were not included as God’s chosen people. As a result, Gentiles did not have the blessings and privileges God graciously afforded to Israel (Rom.9:3-5).

## 3. “*strangers to the covenants of promise*” (vs.12)

Third, and consequently, Paul reminded them that they were “*strangers to the covenant of promise*” (vs.12). In Genesis 12, we read of “*the covenant of promise*” that God made to Abraham: “*Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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’*” (vs.1-3).

Gentiles were “*strangers*” (vs.12; *xenos*) to this promise, which – if they were not graciously included into this promise – meant that they had no share in the salvific blessings of God.

This promise, originally declared in the Garden after Adam and Eve sinned (Gen.3:15), finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ (see Eph.2:19-20).

## 4. “*having no hope*” (vs.12)

Fourth, Paul reminded them that they had “*no hope*” (vs.12). This fourth truth is apparent as we rightly understand the first three. Apart from God’s gracious intervention, Gentiles have “*no hope*” (vs.12; *mē elpis*) of being saved. They had no means of saving themselves; no ability to raise themselves to spiritual life; no merit of goodness or good works.

The Gentiles had no anticipation of a coming Messiah; no expectation of a Savior from God; no right to assume that they could be reconciled to God.

This, of course, is true of every unrepentant sinner. Apart from Christ, the sinner is living in utter despair; destined to face eternity in hell. Dante was right to imagine this inscription over the entrance of hell “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here” (Dante’s *Divine Comedy*).

#### 5. “without God” (vs.12)

Fifthly, Paul reminded them that they were “*without God in the world*” (vs.12). This does not mean that they did not worship something/someone as god – for everyone is worshipping something or someone. Even the most ardent atheist is an idolater at heart – worshipping himself, his lustful passions, his ideologies, even his militant atheism.

This refers to the fact that Gentiles – in and of themselves – had no saving relationship with the one true God.

➤Gentiles were naturally without Christ, without grace, without promise, without hope, and without God.

#### Conclusion

➤Thankfully, these spiritual truths were past realities for these Ephesian Gentiles, and past realities for all Gentiles. We need to remember just who we were apart from Christ. But, for Christians, this is a memory of who we “were”!

**Eph 2:1-3** ~ “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

➤Notice the first two words of verse thirteen: “*But now ...*”:

**Eph 2:13** ~ “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

This is very similar to the stark – good news / bad news – contrast we saw in Ephesians 2:4, “*But God....*” As we were dead in our sin, reeling from the effects of our sin, helplessly circling the drain of God’s just condemnation, there comes good news. This is true for everyone who receives Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

**Eph 2:4-5** ~ “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved”

**1 Cor 6:9-11** ~ “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

➤Next Sunday, Lord willing, we will look at the next section of this passage which outlines what God did in and through His Son, Jesus Christ to save us.