

Text: Eph 2.11-13

First, let's review the major sections of Ephesians so far:

1. Celebration of all the Spiritual Blessings (1.1-14)
2. Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians (growth in full knowledge of Him) (1.15-23)
3. The Work of God in Saving Men (2.1-10) [individual salvation in view]

We now move into a section I am calling:

The Work of God in Creating a New Order

A few comments from the commentaries:

"Individuals who have received God's gracious salvation are not left alone but are brought into union with other believers. In 2:11–22 Paul developed this concept of the corporate unity of saved Jews and Gentiles in the church, Christ's body (cf. 1:22–23)."¹

"New spiritual life does not just mean that we have experienced regeneration individually. Additionally God brings every Christian into union with every other Christian."²

"In the first half of chapter 2 Paul traced the salvation of individual Gentiles and Jews. Now he advances to the abolition of their former national differences, to their union in Christ, and to their formation into the church, a holy temple in the Lord."³

"This parallels Ephesians 2:1–3 (past sin) and 2:4–9 (present grace). Here the Jew-Gentile situation comes to the fore, but it is not social tensions that are uppermost. Rather, the emphasis is on the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan of salvation."⁴

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 625.

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Eph 2.11.

³ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1919.

⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 60.

Now let's read the passage for today: Eph 2.11-13

I. Understanding the syntax

A. Main sentence

1. ¹¹ ¶ Therefore remember that formerly you
2. ¹² [*remember* that you] were at that time separate from Christ
3. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you ... have been brought near

B. Who are “you”?

1. the Gentiles in the flesh
2. who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,”
Sidebar on “Circumcision”

which is performed in the flesh by human hands —

C. What were you?

1. separate from Christ
2. excluded from the commonwealth of Israel
3. strangers to the covenants of promise
4. having no hope
5. without God in the world

D. Recap on “you”

who formerly were far off (points back to the five “withouts”)

E. How were “you” brought near?

by the blood of Christ.

II. Understanding the concepts

A. Remembering your former state

1. “Flesh” here means literal flesh — they were by birth Gentiles, not Jews
2. Called Uncircumcision: a derogatory term, pointing to the division between Jews and Gentiles

“This physical difference between Jews and Gentiles affected every area of their lives. A great social and spiritual boundary existed between them.”⁵

“In verses 11 and 12 the apostle reminds his readers that prior to their conversion they were **Gentiles** by birth and therefore outcasts as far as the Jews were concerned. First, they were despised. This is indicated by the fact that the Jews called them **Uncircumcision**. This meant the Gentiles did not have the surgical sign in their flesh that marked the Israelites as God’s covenant people. The name ‘uncircumcised’ was an ethnic slur, similar to the names that people use today for despised nationalities. We can feel something of its sting when we hear David say concerning the Gentile Goliath, ‘Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?’ (1 Sam. 17:26).”⁶

3. The reality of circumcision (after the work of Christ): it is just a surgical procedure, no longer *any* religious significance

B. Remembering your former separation

“The one word that best describes the Gentiles is *without*. They were ‘outside’ in several respects.”⁷

1. Without Christ: not, like the Jews, “without Jesus,” but “without Christ”

“First, Gentile believers were separate from Christ, the Messiah. They had no corporate national hope centered in a Messiah as the Jews did.”⁸

⁵ Hoehner, “Ephesians in BKCNT,” 625.

⁶ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 1919.

⁷ Warren W Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996), 22.

⁸ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Eph 2.12.

“Not only were they cut off from the Messiah; unlike the Jews they were removed from any understanding of a messiah, a royal deliverer who would redeem them.”⁹

2. Without the commonwealth of Israel

“as a whole, the Gentiles had no part in what God planned to do in and through Israel. The Gentiles were aliens from Israel in this sense.”¹⁰

3. Without (aliens) to the covenants

“They were deprived of direct participation in God’s covenants and thus had no hope of future glory and blessing as Israel did. Israel’s ‘covenants’ include the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:18–21; 17:1–8), the Palestinian (Deut. 28–30), the Davidic (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:1–4), and the New (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–30). These covenants—all pointing to ‘the promise’ of the Messiah and of blessings through Him—assured Israel of a national existence, a land, a King, and spiritual blessings.”¹¹

4. Without hope

“The Greco-Roman ‘hope’ of an afterlife involved crossing the River Styx, paying the boatman Charon with a coin one ‘hoped’ relatives or friends would place in the dead person’s mouth when they died, and walking the Elysian fields for eternity. But there was virtually no certainty that this would come to pass.”¹²

“Nationally, they had no assurance that their land, their government, or their people would survive. And individually their outlook was bleak: they had **no hope** beyond the grave. Someone has said that their future was a night without a star.”¹³

⁹ Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, 61–62.

¹⁰ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Eph 2.12.

¹¹ Hoehner, “Ephesians in BKCNT,” 625.

¹² Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, 62–63.

¹³ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 1920.

5. Without God

“This does not mean they were atheists. They had their own gods of wood and stone, and worshiped them. But they did not know the one and only true God. They were God-less in a godless, hostile world.”¹⁴

III. But now in Christ you have been brought near

- A. Notice the past passive tense: the deed is done!
- B. **But now:** You were formerly far off, but now you are near
- C. Agency — the blood of Christ

“Converts to Judaism had to meet a series of conditions, while God-fearers, one step below converts, believed completely in Judaism but could not be converts until they had been circumcised. In reality, the only condition for becoming a Christian convert is faith in the blood of Christ, and conversion is open to all Gentiles who by faith become full members of the body of Christ, the church.”¹⁵

¹⁴ MacDonald, 1920.

¹⁵ Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, 64.