## Opening Words

Is there someone you need to be reconciled with? A family member? A friend? Have you offended this person and you need to humble yourself and ask forgiveness? Or, perhaps the other person has offended you and you are harboring bitterness in your heart? God wants to work in this situation right now.

## 31 Eph The Darkness of Life Without Christ 1

Do we really need another description of mankind's sin? Paul thinks so, and he revisits this subject beginning with verse 11 of chapter 2 of his great letter. But he does not do this because he has a gloomy outlook or because he has a vendetta as a Jew against gentiles. We already know that when he was describing the predicament of gentiles as being dead in trespasses and sins, as people who were enslaved to the evil one, enslaved to the flesh, and enslaved to the world, he then included the Jews in that same slavery by saying, "we too all formerly lived this way."

We also know that after his initial description of the plight of mankind he then presented a glorious picture of what Christ has done for us in saving us who were dead in our transgressions. Paul is going to do the same here beginning in verse 11. He will present the cold, stark facts of fallen life as a backdrop to explain glorious details of what Christ has done.

It occurs to me that this is one of the reasons why preaching can be shallow. If we do not realize the depth of mankind's sin and the desperate situation we were in, then we will not see Christ as the great Savior that he is. If we do not see him as a great Savior, then we will see him only as a nice teacher with nice sayings about how to be kind and love. And if that is all we preach about Christ and we do not preach him as the **Savior** of sinful mankind and the Lord of all, then our preaching will lose its power.

Paul never fell into this trap. It would have been unthinkable for him and he warned his young disciples against this in his time. Listen to these words from 2 Timothy 4.

> I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: [2] preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. [3] For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, [4] and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. [5] But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

And so here in Ephesians 2, beginning in verse 11, he will detail the sad plight of the gentiles but he is going to add a new element to his description. Instead of talking only about our sin before a holy God, Paul is going to talk about how this sin also expressed itself in separation among people. Remember how I talked about the four faces of death when we looked at Ephesians 2:1 and remember how I talked about the four faces of salvation when I talked about Ephesians 2:8-9?

Death was not just a spiritual death between us and God. Death extended to our relationships, to creation, and to our insides, i.e., to our minds and our psychological well being. We talked about the four **directions** of death – up with God, out with others, down with creation, and in with ourselves.

In the same way there are four directions of salvation – up with God, out with others, down with creation, and in with ourselves.

If we can keep these four directions in mind it will help us see the extent of sin – that sin has affected everything, but it will also help us see the extent of God's work through Christ, how his salvation has affected everything. Whatever was touched by sin and death and was lost, can now be touched by the grace of Christ and be redeemed.

In these verses in chapter 2 beginning in verse 11, Paul shows how sin caused a separation of humanity into Jew and gentile. Let me give you three quick examples in verses 11-12 to show you this. Let me read the verses for you.

> Therefore remember that formerly you, the gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands— 12 *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Paul says six things about the lost-ness of gentiles. Three of them are vertical – i.e., they are descriptions of mankind's lost-ness before God. Three of them are horizontal, i.e., they are descriptions of the alienation between Jew and gentile.

The three vertical descriptions are as follows:

1. Separate from Christ.
2. No hope
3. Without God in the world

The three horizontal descriptions are as follows:

1. We had separate identities – the Jews were called "the Circumcision" and the gentiles "the uncircumcision".
2. The gentiles were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.
3. The gentiles were strangers to the covenants of promise.

Paul will add several more descriptions in the rest of Ch 2 and into Ch 3 but this is enough to reinforce the point that mankind's fallenness is not just with God but with others. There are social consequences to our sin. In the same way, Christ's salvation brings us back to one another.

We need to be brought back to one another, don't we! I read recently that someone studied the documents of ancient history and discovered that for a period of 2350 years, from 1500 BC to AD 850, nations made 7500 covenants with one another, but none of them lasted longer than two years. There's a problem, isn't there, among nations and people.

Remember the story of the Prodigal Son? We usually end the story after the younger son returns and is restored to his father, and we forget there is a second part. The older son returns home from the field and hears the festivities. When he learns that his sinful brother has returned, he refuses to go into the house. The rest of the story is about the father's pleas to his older son to reconcile with his younger brother. Yes, sin works its terrible work outward with others and the heart of God is to work in this outward direction as well and the upward one.

Let me pause here, just for a moment. Is there someone you need to be reconciled with? A family member? A friend? A fellow worker? Have you offended this person and you need to humble yourself and ask forgiveness? Or, perhaps the other person has offended you and you are harboring bitterness in your heart? God wants to work in you right now. Would you pray with me right now?

> "Heavenly Father, you know the hearts of all who are listening. You know those who need to reconcile with others. I ask that your Spirit would work mightily in their hearts at this moment. Father, if some need the courage to go to a friend and ask forgiveness, give them the courage to do that. If some who have been offended or hurt, need to extend forgiveness, grant them the grace to forgive just as you have forgiven them. Grant them the victory over bitterness. I ask that you would do a great work of reconciliation in the hearts of people today, and I ask this in the name of Jesus and for His glory in the world. Amen."

Did you pray that? May the Lord guide you in whatever steps you need to take. Let's get back now to Ephesians 2 and I want to share a few words about Paul's first description of the way gentile and Jew were separated. It had to do with a title or the way the two groups referred to one another. Listen to verse 11 again:

> Therefore remember that formerly you, the gentiles in the flesh, ~~who~~ are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands.

Originally, the separation between Jew and gentile was intended so that God might work with the Jewish people in order that they might bless the gentiles. But this became a degrading separation as gentile and Jew degenerated into the childish but hurtful practice of name calling. The Jews took pride that they were circumcised, not because of the physical difference but because of what the circumcision represented – their covenant with the Creator. Rather than taking this privileged position, humbly walking with God, and graciously extending the truth of God to the lost world, they became inward focused and used their circumcision as a badge of distinction, pride, and superiority. The gentiles were the "uncircumcised" – those who did not have a covenant with God – and they were to be avoided as much as possible.

But notice how Paul describes the first century Jews in this passage. He refers to them as the "so-called Circumcision," and he mentions that this is performed in the flesh by human hands. Paul is here giving a subtle reminder that while physical circumcision was given as a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham, that wasn't the real circumcision God was after. God was after the circumcision of the heart. What they had was something done by human hands. What was needed

was something done by the divine hands. What was meant to be a blessing became a curse, and rather than a tool for drawing people to God, it became a tool for pushing people away.

Such is the nature of sin. Sinful people will even take the good things of God, corrupt them, and bring division among people.

It's good we have a Savior, isn't it! It's good his salvation reaches as far as our sin, and it's good his salvation is more powerful than our sin. We'll be learning more about his great work in the broadcasts ahead as we continue learning and digging into Ephesians 2 and learn more about the wonders of the spiritual world.