

FROM ALIENATION TO RECONCILIATION

(Ephesians 2:11-13)

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is all about the glory God in the life of His church. In particular, this epistle teaches us these three foundational Christian doctrines: the greatness of our salvation in Christ (1:1-2:10); the glory of the church as the one body of Christ (2:11-3:21); and the godly conduct that should characterize the Christian life (4:1-6:24). Our passage, Ephesians 2:11-13 begins a new section which discusses the unity of the church. What better way to display the glory of the church as one body of Christ than to showcase the harmony that exists between two groups of people who were formerly at enmity with each other: the Jews and the Gentiles. The essential lesson of this message is this: Reconciliation with God through Christ is the foundation of reconciliation with others. As Paul starts to unfold the glory of the church as the center of Christ's reconciling work, he gives us these much needed exhortations.

1. Remember your _____ from God.

The long history of animosity between the Jews and Gentiles is ultimately rooted in a prior alienation from God. Paul specifically addressed the Gentile Christians and exhorted them to remember their previous estrangement from God. Paul speaks of their alienation in a number of ways. First, Paul mentions the Gentiles' alienation in terms of their pagan idolatrous background and their contempt as uncircumcised outcasts despised by the Jews (Eph. 2:11; Gen. 17:9-14; Rom. 2:28-29). Then Paul delves into the depths of the Gentiles' spiritual alienation by identifying five disadvantages in contrast to the spiritual privileges enjoyed by the Jews (Eph. 2:12; Rom. 9:5). According to Paul, (a) the Gentiles were Christless since they were separated and cut off from the Messiah; (b) they were stateless because they were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and had no citizenship in God's kingdom; (c) they were covenantless because they were strangers to the covenants of promise; (d) they were hopeless since they did not possess the hope of eternal salvation and glory in Christ and (e) they were godless because they had no genuine relationship with the true and living God.

2. Remember your _____ in Christ.

There's only one way that the barrier of the Gentiles' alienation from God could be overcome: through Christ's work of reconciliation at the Cross. In the words of Paul: "But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off were brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13,16). To be brought near means that God took the sovereign initiative to draw alienated sinners like us to Himself, thereby establishing a loving relationship as His redeemed family in Christ. The root cause of our enmity with God is sin. Hence, it's only through the shed blood of our sinless, holy and perfect divine Savior that our transgressions are atoned for and peace with God is achieved (Rom. 5:10). Since being at peace with God through Christ is the foundation for peace with others, we must therefore "let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, to which we were called into one body," the church of our Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 3:13-15).
