



# THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS

THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

## EPHESIANS 2:11-13

### Outcasts Brought Near

Pastor Anthony Ferguson

Church family, it is too common for us to misunderstand the role of the gospel in our life. We are often told that the gospel is how we come to God, and that is true. However, we are often told an untruth next. We are often told next that after coming to God our focus should be on doing a list of “dos” and not doing a list of “don’ts.” This, however, is not true. After coming to Christ by grace through faith, we do not graduate to a form of Christian legalism where we now rely on works independent of grace and faith. Indeed, there are lots of things that we should be doing and a lot of things that we shouldn’t be doing, but we must



remember the context of these commands. The context is the gospel. We “walk in love” because God has loved us immensely and we do not “walk-in sin” because we have been made alive. The gospel is the message of salvation and of spiritual growth.

We see this idea everywhere in Scripture. For example, the book of Ephesians can be summarized this way. Chapters 1-3 explain the gospel, and chapters 4-6 explain the implications. Overall, Paul tells us in Ephesians that they should walk in love because they have been saved in Christ. Likewise, Ephesians 2:8-10 makes this point concisely. Because we have been saved by grace, we should walk in good works.

The gospel, then, is the heartbeat of the Christian life. It is not merely the introduction to the Christian life. This is what motivates praise of God (1:6, 12, 14), prayer for others (1:15-16), and a desire to walk in good works (2:8-10). Therefore, in Ephesians 1:15-2:10, Paul prayed that the church would know God’s grace more deeply. Now, in Ephesians 2:11-13, Paul commands the church to remember God’s grace. This remembering will lead to growth.



*The main point of this sermon is that we must remember that although we were far from God, Christ has brought us near.*

So let's investigate our former reality outside of Christ and our present reality in Christ in more according to Ephesians 2:11-13, and let's commit to remembering this truth every day this week.

## PRIOR TO CHRIST: EPHESIANS 2:11-12

“*11 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— 12 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.*

In Ephesians 2:11-13, Paul reminds the church of their awful state outside of Christ. This is very similar to what Paul did in Ephesians 2:1-3. There he reminded them that outside of Christ they were 1) spiritually dead, 2) following the devil, and 3) by nature children



of wrath. Now, in Ephesians 2:11-12, Paul commands them to remember this state, but he describes this state slightly differently. First, he describes their former way of life as one that is without Christ. Being without Christ is a horrific state since all spiritual blessings are found only in Christ. Every joyful reality is in Christ and every horrific reality is outside of Christ. The blessings in Christ were described in Ephesians 1:3-14 and the curses outside of Christ were described in Ephesians 2:1-3. Paul wants the church to remember that formerly they were without Christ.

Second, Paul describes their former way of life as alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. God's plan of salvation went through Israel in the Old Testament. In short, God's kingdom was visible in the Old Testament through the nation of Israel. To be in God's kingdom in the Old Testament, you needed to believe God's word as expressed in God's covenant with Israel. Just as in the New Testament, salvation was by faith, not works; yet, just like the NT, faith without works is dead. This is true in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. True saving faith for the Old Testament people of God manifested itself in good works. These works included circumcision, sacrifices, tithes, and celebrating the festivals since these were the laws of the covenant. Conversion in the Old Testament, thus,



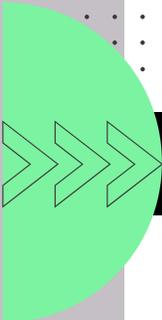
meant that when a person came to trust in the God of Israel, they would become a Jew culturally. They would be circumcised; they would keep the sabbath; they would not eat certain foods, and they would keep the festivals. Thus, to be alienated from the commonwealth of Israel meant that the Ephesians were formerly far from the kingdom of God.

Third, Paul describes them as former strangers to the covenants of promise. God's promise to establish his kingdom on earth is through his covenants. In particular, God promises to establish his kingdom through Abraham and his future offspring (Genesis 12, 15, 17). Moreover, he promises that the nation of Israel would be that kingdom if they obeyed God (Exodus 19:4-6). Formerly, the Ephesians were far from the blessings of God's kingdom since they were foreigners to his covenants.

Therefore, they had no hope and were without God in the world. Being far from Christ, from Israel, and from the covenants meant that formerly the Ephesians had no hope. Formerly, they did not have God. Instead, as Paul has already pointed out, they were spiritually dead (2:1), following the devil (2:2), and children of wrath (2:3).



Paul further makes this point in verse 11. Notice how Paul calls them Gentiles in the flesh. A Gentile in the Old Testament is anyone who has not a Jew. The Ephesians formerly were outside of the people of God – they were uncircumcised. But notice what Paul does. He defines the circumcision of the Jews as one made in the flesh, and this is not true circumcision. Paul knows this because this is the testimony of the Old Testament. Although Israel was circumcised in the flesh according to God’s commandment, they still needed a spiritual circumcision. Circumcision of the flesh was to be a visible picture of a heart dedicated to God. This is why Moses tells Israel in Deuteronomy 10:16 that Israel is to “circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.” It is not sufficient for a Jew to be circumcised physically; they must be circumcised spiritually. Nonetheless, in the Old Testament, Jews were circumcised physically, and these Gentiles were not. This was an indication to them that they were outside of the people of God and far from God’s kingdom.



## PRIOR TO CHRIST: EPHESIANS 2:11-12

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



Yet, this reality is the past. Just like in Ephesians 2:4-7 where Paul reminds the Ephesians of God's work in making them alive, Paul reminds the Ephesian church that their former state is their past. Paul says in verse 13, "But now." Notice that God changes everything. God loves to take those who were spiritually dead and make them alive (Ephesians 2:1-4), and God loves to take those who were far off and bring them near (2:13). Our God loves to bring near the outcast and to make alive the spiritually dead because this brings glory to God. Remember, God's glory is the display of his worth, and everything about God displays his worth. God is omnipotent and omniscient, and this displays that he is good. God is righteous which means he always does what is right. He is holy which means that he is totally devoted to everything right. Whenever God displays any of his characteristics, he displays his glory because each of these characteristics demonstrate his worth. Yet, the pinnacle of his glory is his grace! Think of our God. Our God, in his sovereign freedom, decided that he would be most glorified – his worth would be on greatest display – through the display of grace. The act of making the spiritually dead alive and the act of bringing near the outcast are the acts that most magnify our God.

The gift of God's glorious grace is found only "in Christ." The phrase "in Christ" is how every spiritual blessing



comes to us as made clear in Ephesians 1:3-14. Every spiritual blessing is a gift of grace and grace is found only in Christ (Ephesians 1:7). Brother and sisters, God's grace is magnified in uniting us in Christ as was already made clear in Ephesians 1:9-10.

Moreover, the fact that we are now near to God because we are "in Christ" is only possible because of the blood of Christ. His death on the cross is what brings us near because it is his death on the cross that covers our sins. Our sins demand death and praise be to God for Christ who died for us. The spiritually dead can rise to new life because the eternal God has died in our place. It is Jesus' death that brings us near.



## CONCLUSION

Every Ephesian in this church was once spiritually dead (2:1) and far from God (2:11-12). This state was a state without hope, but God. God did something amazing. He made us alive (Ephesians 2:1-4) and he brought us near (Ephesians 2:11-13). God did something amazing – he showed us grace – because he is amazing – he is a gracious King. Our God rescued us from a state of utter destruction. Oh, this must cause us to praise God (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). Oh, this should lead us to pray



that our church family would understand this amazing grace more deeply. And oh, this should lead us to remember.

Our weekly challenge this week is for us to preach the gospel to ourselves every day this week. When you wake up in the morning, remind yourself that once you were lost, hopeless, and without God, but God brought you near. Reflect on the character of our God. Think of how he delighted in saving you, and how he delights in keeping you in his grace. When you are tempted to think about the life you lived when you were spiritually dead and far from God, remember but God. Even now, as you live trusting God's promises and repenting from your sins daily, remember but God. Brother and sisters, the gospel is not just how we get into the Christian life, it is the heartbeat of the Christian life. This week, I challenge you to remember the gospel in the best moments of this week and in the worst moments. Remember that although you were far, Christ has brought you near.

Non-Christian friends, our God loves to magnify his grace by saving sinners like you who do not deserve it. Whether or not you deserve grace is a settled matter – you do not. That though is the point. Our God extends his righteousness as a gift to anyone who would trust in



Jesus and repent from their sins because this displays his worth to you and the world. Oh, our amazing God designed that he would be glorified in giving us grace. Would you come to God today trusting “in Christ” for forgiveness? If so, please reach out to us so that we can come alongside you to help you grow in your knowledge and love for God.



## LET'S PRAY

Let's pray. Oh, God, thank you that although we were spiritually dead, you have made us alive. Thank you that although we were far, you brought us near. Help us to remember this every day this week. Let us remember your grace so that we praise you more deeply and pray for our church family more often. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

# PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO YOURSELF

- WAKE UP
- RE-READ EPHESIANS 2:11-13
- REMIND YOURSELF THAT ONCE YOU WERE LOST, HOPELESS, AND WITHOUT GOD, BUT GOD BROUGHT YOU NEAR.
- REFLECT ON THE CHARACTER OF OUR GOD.
  - THINK OF HOW HE DELIGHTED IN SAVING YOU, AND HOW HE DELIGHTS IN KEEPING YOU IN HIS GRACE.
  - WHEN YOU ARE TEMPTED TO THINK ABOUT THE LIFE YOU LIVED WHEN YOU WERE SPIRITUALLY DEAD AND FAR FROM GOD, REMEMBER BUT GOD.
  - EVEN NOW, AS YOU LIVE TRUSTING GOD'S PROMISES AND REPENTING FROM YOUR SINS DAILY, REMEMBER BUT GOD.
- WRITE YOUR THOUGHTS OR REFLECTIONS IN THE BOXES ON THIS PAGE.



REMEMBER THE GOSPEL IN THE BEST MOMENTS AND IN THE WORST

MONDAY / JUN 15

TUESDAY / JUN 16

WEDNESDAY / JUN 17

THURSDAY / JUN 18

FRIDAY / JUN 19

SATURDAY / JUN 20

SUNDAY / JUN 21

THE GOSPEL IS NOT JUST HOW WE GET INTO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, IT IS THE HEARTBEAT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE