

he would know not to ask questions like that. You can sing it (“Glory, I’m saved...”), you can pray it (“Thank Thee for saving us...”), but in orthodox circles you just don’t think or say it.

Ever since Luther turned his church door into a Protestant bulletin board, good Christian folks have been yearning for a feel of this forbidden confidence of salvation. Common sense and most of our preachers have warned us to stay clear. Salvation by grace through faith is just too good to be true!

Besides that, how can you keep the masses in line without a healthy fear of coming up short on Judgment Day?

Your solution of course, is to preach grace only as a prelude to a good stiff sermon on works. With all the jokes, illustrations, and theological double-talk removed, it comes out like this in layman’s language: “Salvation is God’s gift! You can’t earn it, but if you don’t earn it, you can’t keep it. Get busy!”

Now it’s true that trying to do all this work without an assurance of being saved produces dread, but that’s just the price you have to pay. Folks may feel frustrated and lost, but after all, that’s what keeps them coming back week after week!

In customary practice, the clergyman selects each week the virtue necessary for the aspiring saint to keep himself saved. The beautiful part of the program is that if the pew-people get close to attaining it, you can switch them next week to a different virtue.

Occasionally someone asks why it wouldn’t be better if we all simply responded to God with works of love. This is a dangerous question. For one, this could cause people to lose their fear. For another, if news of this ever got out, you might have to leave the brotherhood of the true church and start working with the Baptists!

In conclusion, and in order to prevent any more bulletins on the church doors, let us clarify this matter with a few definitions:

GRACE—Divine generosity in offering you a chance to earn the right to keep your salvation.

FAITH—Taking God up on his offer.

WORKS—The rental fee on the promise of salvation. Anytime you can’t quite work up the agreed price, you are evicted from the promises.

(I trust you caught the irony of this!)

Lesson Four (2:11-22)

One Body in Place of Two (2:11-16)

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. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

God has not only conquered death through Jesus Christ; he has also conquered division. “Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11). Christ not only reconciles man to God; he also reconciles man to his fellow man.

V. 11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh—Paul has reminded us in the preceding ten verses how we were all dead and doomed, until God saved us. Now he points out that the Gentiles (all non-Jews) have even more reason to be thankful, for they were more alienated from God.

As the chosen people of God, the Jews felt contempt and hostility for the Gentiles. This is well illustrated by two quotations from the Talmud, the official body of Jewish civil and religious law. “Kill the best of the Gentiles! Crush the head of the best of snakes!” “The daughter of an Israelite may not assist a Gentile woman in childbirth, since she would be assisting to bring to birth a child for idolatry.”

called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision—It was highly derogatory to call someone “uncircumcision,” for the Greek word means literally “foreskin of the male penis.” Circumcision represented a division which was at once religious, social, racial, national, and physical. No dividing line of creed or color today could be more complete.

which is made in the flesh by hands—Paul no longer recognized circumcision as a mark of the covenant, identifying God’s people. In Christ there is a circumcision made **without** hands (Col. 2:11). The seal of the new covenant is not an external marking, but one that is internal and spiritual.

V. 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ—Paul continues to list for the Gentiles (and us, their descendants) the ways in which they were cut off from God. They were not a part of the people awaiting the Messiah or Christ. They were separated not merely as those who do not yet believe, but as not even having a right to hear!

alienated from the commonwealth of Israel—The Gentiles were aliens, and had never been anything else. They were cut off from God’s community. Even after the church was established many Jewish Christian thought the Gentiles must first become Jewish proselytes before they were eligible to accept Christ. This shows how complete the alienation had been.

and strangers to the covenants of promise—God had made his promises to Abraham and his seed. This clearly left the Gentiles out—at least, in the mind of the Jews! It is interesting that in several ancient languages, the word “stranger” was synonymous with “enemy.” This reflects the thought pattern of the times.

having no hope—Apart from the hope of a Messiah, there was no hope. Hopelessness was the state of most of the Graeco-Roman world in the first century. Gilbert Murray’s classic description of the times was a “failure of nerve.” Their government was corrupt and their gods were dead.

and without God in the world—The climax of failure and separation was to be without God. Furthermore, to be without God in this world is also to be without God in the world to come! This tragic circumstance was true for the Gentiles of the first century, and it is also true for a majority of the world’s population today.

V. 13 But now in Christ Jesus—What a wonderful change God can make! Spiritual death was reversed by “But God...” (Eph. 2:4), and spiritual alienation is ended by “But now in Christ Jesus...”

you who once were far off have been brought near—Those who were “far off” were the Gentiles, and they were specifically included in the very first Gospel invitation. “This promise is to you and to your children **and to all that are far off**” (Acts 2:39)

in the blood of Christ—The same blood that removes the stain of sin also removes the stigma of separation. In Christ there can be no barriers of class or color, because we have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27-28).

V. 14 For he is our peace—Peace is not just the absence of conflict, it is the positive presence of true harmony. Jesus is our peace. He himself is the only means of reconciliation between man and God. When a man is then right with God, he must also get right with

his fellow men—regardless of whether they are Jew or Gentile!

who has made us both one—The unity between Jew and Gentile was not just organizational or mechanical union. It was a genuine “oneness” which Paul will later call “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3).

and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility—The “wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles sometimes took on physical reality. At the Temple in Jerusalem there was an outer perimeter called the Court of the Gentiles. This area was separated from the inner courtyards and the Temple itself by a fence or screen. Archaeologists have found at least two of the warning signs that were posted all along that fence. Chiseled into stone, with red paint to make the inscription more bold, was this warning: “No Gentile may enter inside the enclosing screen around the Temple. Whoever is caught is alone responsible for the death which follows.” (*Archaeology and the New Testament*, by J.A. Thompson, p. 36)

That the Jews took this seriously is shown by the mob’s outrage against Paul in Acts 21:28, since he had allegedly “brought Greeks into the temple, and he has defiled this holy place.”

V. 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances—It was the O.T. law that actually separated Jews from Gentiles, so it was the law that Jesus had to abolish. Jesus set the law aside by fulfilling all its demands of righteousness, and then paying off the debt we owed because of unrighteousness. Just like a mortgage finally paid off, the law was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). In fact, when Jesus cried out, “It is finished!” he used the very same Greek expression often found at the bottom of a certificate of debt meaning “Paid in Full”!

that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two—It was through Jesus that man was originally created (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). Because of the effects of sin, man came to be divided—religiously, socially, and otherwise. Now the same Jesus has created one new man to be all that the original Adam was intended to be.

V. 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body—The purpose of unity is the reconciliation of man to God. Unity apart from God has no particular value. At the tower of Babel men were united in location, language, and purpose—but apart from God. So God broke them up! Not long afterward, in order to deal with sin and salvation, God separated Abraham and began the Jewish nation. God’s ultimate goal was completed in Jesus Christ. In Christ he could bring mankind back together, but this time in unity with himself.

through the cross—The cross marked the end of sin’s reign and the end of legal separation of Jew and Gentile.

thereby bringing the hostility to an end—Literally, “having killed the enmity by it.” This enmity, now slain, has existed between man and God, as well as between man and other men.

The Family of God (2:17-22)

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

V. 17 And he came and preached peace—Jesus came in fulfillment of all that Isaiah, the “Gospel Prophet” had said the Messiah would be. (See Isa. 52:7; 57:19). Jesus was called the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6) who came to guide people into the way of peace) Luke 1:79). If at times Jesus seemed to cause discord instead of peace (Matt. 10:34), it was because real peace must begin with reconciliation to God—and anything standing in the way of that must be removed!

to you who were far off and peace to those who were near—“You who were far off” were Paul’s Gentile readers in Ephesus and Asia Minor. Although there were Jews living throughout that area, they nearly always rejected Paul’s preaching. The Gospel remains available, however, to both Jew and Gentile, and to all of us today, regardless of ancestry.

V. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father—The key word here is “access.” It was used in Greek society for the “right to approach,” as when a person has received an introduction to the king. Christ Jesus gives us access to God. No longer is there a fence to keep out Gentiles; no longer is there a great veil of the Temple to keep out every Jew except the High Priest.

“Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” (Hebrews 10:19-22)

V. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners—In the Old Testament “sojourners” were also called “strangers within the gates.” They were non-Jews who lived among the Jews and were tolerated with some distaste. They were bound by Jewish laws (Exodus 20:10), but were not allowed to share in their sacred activities, such as a Passover supper (Exodus 12:45).

In Christ Jesus there are no “half-way” citizens. No one is merely tolerated in God’s kingdom!

but you are fellow citizens with the saints—Have you ever seen the joy and pride of an immigrant who has become a naturalized citizen of the United States? He is happy because he has become a rightful participant in what he considers the best country in the world. He has the right to vote, to hold office, to own property, and to live without fear of deportation. Even if certain other citizens do not like him, he has a right to stay! (He may, of course, elect to renounce his citizenship at some later date, but his fellow citizens cannot throw him out.) See also Phil. 3:20-21.

and members of the household of God—Now the figure changes from a kingdom to a family. The proper understanding of the member of God’s household is not a servant, but a son! The church is the family of God. Christians are God’s children (1 John 3:1) and are supposed to exhibit the traits and characteristics of their Father (Eph. 5:1).

V. 20 built upon the foundation—Now the figure changes again. The church is pictured as a building with a firm foundation. This imagery is also found in 1 Peter 2:4-8. In that passage the living stones of this temple building are the Christians themselves.

of the apostles and prophets—By God’s grace ordinary men were given the privilege of having important positions in the founding of the church (Matt. 16:18-19; John 20:22-23). The apostles are also seen as the foundation of the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14).

The prophets mentioned here are probably persons in the first century church having the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:28), rather than Old Testament prophets. The use of “apostles and prophets” in Eph. 3:5 and 4:11 seems to confirm this.

Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone—While the figure used in 1 Cor. 3:11 has Jesus as the whole foundation, another figure is used here to bring out an additional truth. Jesus is the cornerstone of the holy temple building.

The Common understanding of “cornerstone” is the first stone of a foundation, from which all measurements are made for the rest of the building. Jesus is certainly

worthy of this application. However, there is good evidence that the word “cornerstone” (Gk. *acrogoniaios*) should be translated as “head of the corner” or “capstone.” This figure sets Christ up as the topmost stone of the building, having prominence and priority. This parallels the image of Christ as “head” of his body the church.

There is an interesting parallel in the use of this word in the *Testament of Solomon*, a Jewish work from the first century which describes the building of Solomon’s Temple. “The Temple was being completed. And there was a great *acrogoniaios* stone which I was wanting to set as the head of the corner.” Therefore a workman “went up the ladder bearing the stone and set it at the top of the arch of the entrance of the Temple.”

V. 21 in whom the whole structure is joined together—Christ gives the building unity and purpose, just as he unites the “body” in Eph. 4:16. The building or body grows up into its head.

The word for “joined together” was used by the Greeks when all the parts made a complete whole, when different music blended in harmony, or when a man and his bride were joined in wedlock. The emphasis is the harmonious blending of diverse parts into a united whole.

and grows into a holy temple in the Lord—This building is alive and growing! Each living stone is built upon the living foundation of apostles and prophets and together they grow up into the head stone Jesus Christ.

While in the Old Testament the glory of God dwelt in a tent tabernacle pitched in the wilderness, or in a stone temple in Jerusalem, now God dwells in a living temple. Formerly, the people could not fully approach God’s dwelling; now, God has brought his dwelling into his people! The word “temple” here (Gk. *naos*) had special reference to the Holy of Holies, the sacred sanctuary within the temple where the glory of God hovered above the mercy seat and the ark of the covenant.

V. 22 in whom you also are built into it—Paul’s Gentile readers were also a part of the church. They had a rightful place in the walls of the living structure. They could not be knocked out of the wall without leaving an ugly gap. (See 1 Peter 2:4-8.)

for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit—If a person loves Jesus and keeps his word, the Father and Son will take up residence in that person, in the form of the Holy Spirit (John 14:23). The Gospel invitation promises the indwelling gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38), and the presence of the Spirit identifies the Christian as a child of God (Eph. 1:13-14). If anyone does not have

God dwelling in him, as the Spirit of Christ, he simply does not belong to God (Rom. 8:9).

In these last four verses, three different figures have been employed to depict the church. In all, Ephesians uses five such pictures:

1. A kingdom (2:19)
2. A family (2:19)
3. A building, which is both a temple and home (2:20-22)
4. A body (1:23)
5. A bride (5:23-32)

Each of these figures brings out an important and beautiful lesson about the nature of the church and her relationship to her Lord.

Study Questions

1. In what ways did Paul say the Gentiles were cut off from God in verses eleven to thirteen?
2. How is each of these forms of alienation answered elsewhere in Ephesians? (See especially 2:13-19)
3. Does world history agree with Paul’s assessment of the predicament of the Gentiles?
4. What was found in Jerusalem which graphically illustrates the “dividing wall of hostility?”
5. How did the law separate men from God and from one another?
6. How did the cross solve the problem?
7. What were sojourners?
8. What does it mean to be “members of God’s household”?
9. In what way is Jesus Christ the cornerstone of the church?

10. If we are the temple and dwelling place of God in the Spirit, how will that affect our lives? (See 1 Cor. 3:16-17 and 6:19-20.)

Lesson Five (3:1-13)

Paul's Part in the Plan (3:1-6)

1 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of man in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

God has a plan for the salvation of mankind, and Paul had a key role in that plan. In order to make the blood of Christ available to all men, Paul was commissioned to bring the Gentiles into the new covenant. This lesson will focus on Paul's mission to the Gentiles and the blessings which resulted from it.

V. 1 For this reason—Paul now resumes the prayer which he had stated in 1:15. The “reason” he mentions is the gracious goodness of God in giving salvation and all the spiritual blessings.

Just as in chapter one, however, Paul no sooner starts this prayer than he digresses again. It seems that his heart must have been overwhelmed with God's provision for salvation, so he just had to tell about it. The prayer is resumed again in verse 14 of this chapter and is concluded in verses 20 and 21.

I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus—Paul wrote this epistle during his imprisonment in Rome. Other epistles written from this same imprisonment are Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Paul did not consider himself a prisoner of the Roman emperor Nero, nor a prisoner of the Jews. He was a prisoner for Christ Jesus. If his Lord had not wanted him there, not all the power of Rome could have held him. His confinement could not shake his confidence (Phil. 1:12-14).

on behalf of you Gentiles—It was for the sake of Gentiles, such as his readers, that Paul was in prison. God had called him to open the gates of salvation to the

Gentiles, and this was what got him into so much trouble with the Jews. With the mention of his mission to the Gentiles, Paul must now again digress from his prayer and tell about God's plan.

V. 2 assuming that you have heard—His readers had indeed heard about the work of the Apostle Paul. The word “assuming” implies no doubt here, just as there is no doubt in 4:21, where the same Greek expression is used. Paul is simply reminding of what they already know, before he begins to build upon it.

the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you—The word “stewardship” (Gk. *oikonomia*) is also translated “dispensation” or “assignment.” It refers to the responsibility that is laid upon a servant or steward to accomplish a given task. The assignment of this task was given to Paul when he was converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:16-18).

It is most interesting that Paul should look upon his job assignment as a matter “of God's grace.” As a matter of fact, the giving of God's grace always carries with it responsibility. The privilege always demands purpose. While the grace of God is free and unmerited, God expects unworthy men to attempt a worthy response (Eph. 2:8-10). Thus, for Paul, the handing out of God's grace to him also meant the handing out of a job.

V. 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation—The word “mystery” means a “secret” which people do not know until they are told (Eph. 1:9). God's secret strategy for saving the world was to have Jesus die on the cross, and then to offer free salvation to all men—including Gentiles! (See the parallel text in Col. 1:24-29.)

Paul had not guessed the secret plan, nor was he taught it by other men (Gal. 1:1, 11-12). God revealed the secret to Paul directly, and then commissioned him to tell all men.

as I have written briefly—Paul is referring to the previous two chapters of this same epistle. In them he has begun briefly to outline God's secret strategy to reconcile fallen man to himself. The primary purpose of the plan was to restore the man-to-God relationship. A secondary purpose, which is really a necessary corollary to the first, was to restore the man-to-man relationships. True unity with God must bring about unity with other men, whether they are Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians. No man can make his faith a purely private matter, ignoring the rest of the body of believers.

V. 4 When you read this—As Paul's readers read the first two chapters and continued on with this present chapter, they would understand the secret plan.

you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ—From this verse through verse 8, Paul will be