

**Brought Near**  
Ephesians 2:11-13 (11/05/17)  
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Ephesians 2:11-13 *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. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Have you ever thanked God for the gift of memory? Imagine life without it; every morning you'd have to get to know yourself again. There's the rare condition called amnesia, where you forget stuff you ought to remember – memorable events, important people, vital facts - passwords. It's good you remember who your wife is and some of your wives may wonder at times if you do! But even more important is how easy it is to quickly forget spiritual stuff. Many experience spiritual amnesia every day. Biblical truth seems to run through brains like water through a spaghetti strainer. You learn about seeing God in your trials on Sunday mornings and when a trial comes on Monday you forget all about God sovereignly bringing that trial to help you grow! You learn about esteeming others above yourself, and then get upset when someone mistreats you. You learn about returning good for evil, but then fire back with evil on Tuesday when someone insults you. Spiritual amnesia.

Notice the second word in our text – “remember.” God wants you to work hard to fight spiritual amnesia. In Deuteronomy God told Israel over and over, “Remember, you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out.” In Deuteronomy 6:12 God adds, “Don't forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery!” God gave a command to Israel to remember and He gives us the same command here in Ephesians. Remember. Remember what God has done for you. Remember who you are in God's plan. Make a conscious effort so you don't forget. That's why we have the Lord's Table – to remember Christ!

The gift of memory is a precious thing. However, too often we distort the preciousness of memory by remembering and dwelling on the wrong things. We remember all the bad stuff people did to us. We dwell on all the ways our spouses have offended us. God doesn't say, “Remember what other people did to you.” Rather He says, “Remember who you were without me and don't forget what I have done for you.” So this morning we're going to look at two things God says we need to remember and dwell on and never forget. First of all, remember who you were before you came to Christ – vs. 11-12. Then remember who you are since you came to Christ – vs. 13.

**First, remember who you were before you came to Christ – vv. 11-12**

*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.*

The first two chapters of Ephesians are all about how God has blessed you with every spiritual blessing. From choosing you before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) to giving you Christ's resurrection power (Eph. 1:19-20), you are blessed in Christ. That's who you are. Read the truth of those chapters over and over. Write down all the ways God has blessed you in Ephesians 1. Then in Ephesians 2:1 review how you were completely dead in your sin, like the vision of those dry bones in Ezekiel 37. You were slaves to your godless flesh, under Satan's authority, and deserving of God's wrath. But then in Eph. 1:4 you have one of the great “But God...” transitions. The merciful, loving, gracious and kind God gave you new life, made you a new creation, raised you with Christ into heavenly regions, and works in you to will and do His good pleasure to the glory of God. Whew! What a list of spiritual blessings! Remember them.

Now in Ephesians 2:11-22 God looks at you as His people and shows you how He has brought people of every nation, tribe, tongue, and color near to Him to make them His people. He's talking about the amazing world-wide phenomenon called the church! The church includes all of God's people in Christ and for over 2000 years this church has endured. At times it sailed through bloody seas with great persecution, yet it endures. In spite of constant opposition, Christ has kept his promise, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not, never overpower it." Now how did it all happen? How are there churches in Russia and China and Thailand and Africa and Syria and all over the globe? Because God continues sending the never ending power of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Stop and realize how awesome this church is? Christ is building it. And if you are a child of God, you are part of it!

The most amazing development in the first century was that the church was made up of both Jews and Gentiles who actually worshipped and served together in the name of Christ. Consider this amazing because these two groups – non-circumcised Gentiles and circumcised Jews – hated each other. Gentiles despised Jews. And Jews believed God created Gentiles to fuel the fires of hell. If a Gentile neighbor woman was struggling in child birth, the Jewish neighbor was not to help. Everything in first century Judaism separated Jews from Gentiles. There were other factions within each group. Learned Greeks despised other Gentiles as barbarians. Pharisees and Sadducees looked down their noses at all the country bumpkin Jews. The story of man; everybody thinks they're group is better than everyone else's. Hitler believed the Jews and Poles were subhuman, *untersmensch*, and so justified mass murders in the Nazi minds.

Beginning with the Jews and Gentiles in the first century, Christ's church brings people of every different sect and kind together, but not without a struggle. The book of Acts records this struggle when the church leaders ask, "What do we do with these uncircumcised Gentile believers?" Some said, "Circumcise them!" Others said, "No ham sandwiches for Jewish Christians." Paul straightened them out in Galatians, "If you say we are justified by faith plus circumcision, you are preaching a false gospel! Let that preacher be accursed!" It's purely the grace and sovereign providence and power of God that the church has survived down through the centuries. We live in a fallen world and people hate each other, nations hate each other, and sadly, God's people sometimes act as if they hate each other. They're all divided up. Look, there are thirteen churches on Oak Hill Road! Let me just say, we love 'em all, but we love God's truth the most. The way to bring people into the unity of the body of Christ is not to legislate unity or get rid of truth but to preach the gospel. There will always be divisions and denominations and separations among God's people. That doesn't stop Christ from building His church.

In verse 11 Paul exhorts these Gentile believers to remember. The first thing they are to remember is who they were before they came to Christ. This doesn't mean they are to remember how other people mistreated them. Forget that part of the past; they mistreated Jesus too. They were to remember who they were before someone brought the gospel to them. What about you? What consumed your life? What motivated you? What were you living for? Even if you don't remember exactly when someone brought you the gospel, you still know your life before you knew Christ. Paul wants to drill these truths of your past pre-gospel life into your hearts so you now live mindful of God's rich mercy and grace given to you after responding to the gospel.

- **Separate from Christ.** You were without Christ. You didn't know and love Christ. You may have known about Him, but you didn't know Him as your Savior. Millions, billions of people around the world this morning are totally ignorant of Christ. Sadly, false religions have emerged over the centuries to try to fulfill that universal sense of eternity and need for spiritual life in human hearts. That's who you were before the gospel affected your life – Christless.
- **Excluded from God's people.** Gentiles were excluded from Israel. God chose Israel as His nation to bring in His Son. Today the Church is made up of God's chosen people. You may have been part of a church gathering or some other group, but until you personally responded to the good news of Christ, you were outside the body of Christ. You knew something wasn't right. You knew you didn't belong.
- **Ignorant of God's promises.** Even if you knew some promises in the Bible (like John 3:16), you really didn't care. They were just words; you didn't love them or take hope in them or glory in them. God gave sure promises to Abraham, Moses, and David. To the church in the first century,

God put His promises in His precious Word the Bible. You heard them, but you really weren't interested. You went to church occasionally, but were basically bored. Many Gentiles say, "I don't need this Jesus thing. I can handle life on my own!" You didn't think much about dying and eternity. You may have occasionally thought, "I'm going to die; everyone does. Then what?" But somehow those thoughts didn't grip you and you managed to bury them under a pile of excuses and ignored them. You may have been like the English philosopher and evolutionist Herbert Spencer regarding death and eternity when he said, "I habitually shun the thought."

- **Without hope.** Your hopes were not in God. You really had no ultimate, final hope. Hope is one of the sweetest words in the human language, but there is only one reason for final and ultimate hope – the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. You assured yourself that when you're dead, you're dead. That's it. That's the end. And all those brainiacs in lab coats behind academic podiums reinforced what you wanted to hear, "We came from nothing, there's no God spying on you to hold you accountable, and you'll finally become worm food. So don't worry about it and live for your own pleasure."
- **Without God.** You really were literally "godless" in your own life. This is the Greek word "atheist" as in Richard Dawkins, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and millions of others. Think of it. Without God! No God to go with you through the shadow of death. No God to trust in trials. As Paul was standing trial and about to be beheaded he said, "Nevertheless, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me." But you and I were godless in God's universe. You were godless while enjoying God's sun, air, food, and pleasures. You were godless and lived with no boundaries on what is right and wrong. There was no fear of God before your eyes. According to Romans 1:18ff, this is why people are bolting for the exit of God's moral order and giving themselves over to all kinds of sexual perversion and indulgence. And even religious and moral people are without God. They may be aware of God, but they have never submitted to God's plan of salvation, to the gospel, or to the power of God that brings salvation to sinners. They are without God.
- **In the world.** Finally, you were in the world, of the world, living for the world. You indulged in this world with its pleasures and friendships and beauties, but this world was all you really had. The whole earth is full of God's glory, but you and I before Christ were too blind to see it.

This is the dismal picture and condition of the Gentile lost world. No Christ, no fellowship with God's people, no promises of a coming Messiah, no hope, no God. The lost world is a world full of war and disease and suffering and strife and division and abuse and hopelessness with no message from the loving God who came to rescue us from our guilt and empty way of living.

God says, "Therefore remember." Remember the pit from which God rescued you! John Newton had painted over the fireplace in his study Deuteronomy 15:15, "But you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you!" In his epitaph he summed up his life like this: "John Newton, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy."

### **Second, remember who you are now, since you came to Christ – v. 13**

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

Let's park on those first two words, "But now." Your entire Christian life is embedded in those two words, "But now." You were separate from Christ, but now! I hope there is a clear and absolute "but now" in your life. You may have led a godless, immoral, messed up life, hateful and hating others. Then someone brought you the gospel. God worked and gave you understanding. It made sense, you bowed your heart in repentance and faith to Jesus, and your life radically changed. You had an obvious "but now" change. Some grow up hearing about Jesus and never went into a crazy life of outward sin, but you still must see there was a "but now" time in your life. You may not have a clear memory of a point in time, but know this. You don't grow into Christ; you come into Christ. You are born physically at a point in time and you are born spiritually at a point in time. If you have doubts about whether you've really had a "but now" in your life, go to God in prayer and reaffirm your trust in Jesus. But listen to this: the non-Christian has no "but

now” in his life. He may have joined the socialist party or become an Independent or become a Mason or joined a church somewhere along the way, but that’s not a heart-changing, eternity-gaining “but now.”

God gives us three “but now” realities here. Remember these three glorious facts.

**As a believer in Jesus, you are now “in Christ.”** That’s an absolute. You are either in Christ or not, and the only way into Christ is by faith alone. You bring nothing in your hands. You just go in. Look at that door on Noah’s Ark. How do you go into that ark? You can’t stand in the door way wondering if you should go in after all. You don’t drag all your religious baggage with you through the door. Like the gate into heaven in Matthew 7:13-14, you go in as a beggar, poor in spirit! You don’t say, “Well, I’m trying to be in. I need to fix up some stuff in my life first. Plus, I kind of want to keep my options open. Is this the only ark? What about all those other people over there who aren’t getting on this ark? They don’t like Noah and his family. There must be more than one ark for the coming flood. I’ll take my chances.” Remember who you are. You were outside of Christ, and now you are now in Christ Jesus.

**You’ve been brought near.** You will never get over this. Instead of being shut out of heaven, instead of being far away from God and all His goodness and presence and grace, you have been brought near! There is no more wonderful truth about a sinner who was under God’s wrath than to know he or she has been brought near. You’ve been brought into eternal fellowship with your loving and glorious God! You not only have heard about God, but you have been brought into His fellowship and now you’re getting to know Him. You’re beginning to love Him with all your mind and heart and soul and strength. You are learning about Him and loving what you learn. God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchanging in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. He is your Father. He is your God, forever! Don’t forget it! Remember!

But how can we, sinners and enemies of God, be brought near? We deserve His judgment, not His loving fellowship. How can we be brought near? We’ve broken every command. We’ve not even kept the first one of having no other god before Him, let alone all the rest. I have not loved God with everything I am since I got up this morning. We’re murderers in our thoughts with our selfish irritations, nasty words, and arguments. We’ve committed adultery with our eyes on a woman to lust in our hearts, or thinking we’d be happier with someone else. We’ve lied and stolen in untold ways, probably every day! We are criminals before the justice of God. How can we possibly be brought near? Not by your baptism. Your infant baptism didn’t bring you near to God. It didn’t take away your original sin or make you part of the church. Not by being part of a Christian family. Not by making major donations to good causes. Not by severe treatment of your body like fasting and long prayer vigils. Wesley and Whitefield and Luther tried all those and they didn’t bring them near to God.

No, being brought near is something God does. We’ve been brought near – that’s passive. We didn’t gather all our religious credentials and assault the gates of heaven with our own free will. No, Christ came and died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God – love that verse in 1 Peter 3:18. **So how are we brought near? BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.** We read Matthew 26 this past Friday in the Bible reading plan. Christ agonized and struggled there in the garden as He prayed to fulfill the Father’s will to redeem all His chosen people. How hard it was for Christ to go to that cross. And there our Savior, Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, shedding His blood in a violent death. He endured, absorbed, and completely satisfied the wrath of God on sin, wrath poured upon Him by His own loving but just Father. Wrath poured out into His Son’s soul in our place for our sin. Christ did this so He could bring us near to His heavenly Father to enjoy His fellowship forever. We’ve been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Never forget. Remember who you were before you came to Christ. And remember who you are now that you’ve come to Christ by faith. Beware of spiritual amnesia. Remember these key truths and realities. Who are you? You are a sinner whom Jesus has brought near into God’s presence forever. Rejoice and thrill to these two memories. And be sure you have both sides of these memories. Be sure you have a “but now” in your life story, when you came to Christ as a sinner asking God to save you. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved” (Acts 16:31).