

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON TWENTY-FIVE)

“CHRISTLESS, STATELESS, FRIENDLESS, HOPELESS,
GODLESS: THAT’S WHAT WE WERE”

EPHESIANS 2:8-22 (KING JAMES VERSION)

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

In our previous **Lesson**, we stated that in the first half of **Ephesians 2** (verses **1-10**), Paul addressed the matter of the salvation of sinners in general, while in the second half (verses **11-22**), he focused on the work of Christ for the Gentiles in particular, and on the reconciliation of Gentiles and Jews in their union with Christ.

Paul desired for the Christians living in Ephesus to understand that in the purpose and plan of God, both Jews and Gentiles had been brought together and made one in Christ.

In verses **11-22**, Paul explains how those who have been saved by the grace of God, have become part of one body, or a single family. He tells us how the gospel extends to both Jews and Gentiles, hope, promise, and a relationship with God **and each other**. Most of the members of the Ephesian church were Gentiles and Paul therefore, addresses them in particular, in this section of his letter.

Paul knew that if Christianity was to impact the world in any significant way, it was critical that the Jews and the Gentiles who had accepted Christ, live together in love and unity in one body — the church. The Apostle wanted to witness in the Ephesian church, the realization of God's purpose and plan, which was for the Jewish and Gentile believers, having been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ, to be reconciled **to each other also** in light of the fact that they were all members of one body.

In **1 Corinthians 12:12-26**, he directly addresses this matter of the individual members of the church being incorporated into one body:

12 For just as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body — though many — are one body, so too is Christ.

13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.

14 For in fact the body is not a single member, but many.

15 If the foot says, "Since I am not a hand, I am not part of the body," it does not lose its membership in the body because of that.

16 And if the ear says, "Since I am not an eye, I am not part of the body," it does not lose its membership in the body because of that.

17 If the whole body were an eye, what part would do the hearing? If the whole were an ear, what part would exercise the sense of smell?

18 But as a matter of fact, God has placed each of the members in the body just as he decided.

19 If they were all the same member, where would the body be?

20 So now there are many members, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor in turn can the head say to the foot, "I do not need you."

22 On the contrary, those members that seem to be weaker are essential,

23 and those members we consider less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our unpresentable members are clothed with dignity,

24 but our presentable members do not need this. Instead, God has blended together the body, giving greater honor to the lesser member,

25 so that there may be no division in the body, but the members may have mutual concern for one another.

26 If one member suffers, everyone suffers with it. If a member is honored, all rejoice with it.
(New English Translation)

Because every true believer in Christ has received the gift of the Holy Spirit, every true believer is a member of the body of Christ. Race, social status, wealth, or gender, are neither advantages nor handicaps as we fellowship and serve the Lord.

In **Ephesians 2:11-12** Paul writes, *“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”*

The word *“wherefore”* at the beginning of the passage indicates, that what is going to follow is a personal, ethical application of what has been said previously in verses **1-10**. The great things accomplished by the grace of God for the saints in Ephesus, particularly those who were Gentiles, should incline them to think of the past from which they had been delivered. The remembrance of their dead, disobedient, depraved, doomed, pre-conversion condition should awaken in them an overwhelming sense of gratitude for their present privileged state, and inspire them to walk in the good works which God had ordained for them.

Paul is saying to them, in effect, “Listen you Gentiles, I want you to always consider your present exalted position in the light of your former low estate, so that you will never forget to glorify the God who saved you. Remember that before you were saved, your case was in a sense, even more hopeless than that of the unsaved Jews, for you were Gentiles. You carried the evidence of your estrangement in your very flesh, for you were not circumcised. The unsaved Jews contemptuously call you ‘the uncircumcised.’ They do this even though they, who refer to themselves as ‘the circumcised,’ possess only the sign of circumcision in the flesh, not the reality of circumcision of the heart. Their circumcision was outward not inward. Of course, the real meaning or value of circumcision has been erased with Christ’s death on the cross. Yet, in this outward mark, the Jews continue to glory, while they despise all others, including you in Ephesus.”

Paul lists **five things** that were true of these uncircumcised Gentiles before the grace of God intervened in their lives. These five things clearly indicate how desperate and miserable their condition was. The word that best describes their pre-conversion state is the word “without.” They were **without Christ, without citizenship, without covenants, without hope, and without God**. In other words, they were **Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless!**

The **first**, is that they were **without Christ**. The former condition of the Gentiles was one in which they had no connection with Christ. The Gentiles in Ephesus worshiped the goddess, Diana, and, before hearing the Gospel, they knew nothing about Christ. In this respect, they were in a greatly inferior position to the Jews, who were always praying, hoping and waiting for Christ, the Messiah.

It is important for us to understand that when Paul speaks of the Gentiles as being “*without Christ*,” he was not saying that before their conversion, Christ had had no interest in them or had paid no attention to them, for in chapter **one** and verses **four** and **five**, Paul had already informed them that they had been included in the number of the elect from all eternity: “*For he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him in love. He did this by predestining us to adoption as his legal heirs through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will.*” His meaning was that before their conversion, this oneness “in Christ” had not been experienced by them in any sense whatever, nor did they have any expectation of such an experience! The point is not that these Ephesians were without Christ as Saviour, but that as Gentiles, they had no covenant connection with Him as the Jews had with Him as Messiah.

The Gentiles had been groping in the darkness, filth, and despair of sin without any knowledge of how lost they were. Thus, their former state they had been unspeakably wretched. Their being “*without Christ*,” their lack of all relation to Him, was the first indication of the dark picture of their former heathen life, and the other four “withouts” on the list all result from this first one. In considering this, let us keep in mind that every unsaved person, Jew or Gentile, is, in a sense, “*without Christ*” and to remain in such a state means eternal condemnation.

Before they were saved, the Ephesian Gentiles had been **Christless** and so were we.

The **second** thing is that they were **without citizenship**. Paul says that they were “*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.*” This phrase expresses the idea of being a stranger as contrasted with one who is at home with a person or an object. The word “*commonwealth*” is the translation of a Greek word which has two main senses, firstly, a state or commonwealth, and secondly, citizenship or the rights of a citizen. I am of the view that Paul uses the word here in both senses.

The Ephesians had no part in the theocracy, which was the Old Testament constitution under which God made Himself known to the Jews and entered into relations with him or her. Since the Gentiles had no part in the theocracy, they had no citizenship or the rights of a citizen in the “Israel of God.” To be sure, they were included in the Roman province of Asia, and therefore, they were not stateless in every conceivable sense. But they were excluded from the many blessings that pertained to the Jewish theocracy. They lacked citizenship among the chosen people. This was, indeed, a deplorable lack, for it was to Israel that God had revealed himself in a special manner. To Israel, he had given His law, His special protection, His prophecies and His promises.

Paul highlighted the special relationship that existed between God and the nation of Israel in **Romans 9:4-5**. He refers to his fellow countrymen in the following way, “*who are Israelites.*”

To them belong the adoption as sons, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from them, by human descent, came the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever! Amen” (New English Translation).

Before they were saved, the Ephesian Gentiles had been **stateless** and so were we.

The **third** thing that was true of these uncircumcised Gentiles before they were saved was that they were **without covenants**. Paul says that they were “*strangers from the covenants of promise.*” The definite article is in the Greek text. It is, “strangers from the covenants of the promise.” The word “*strangers*” is the translation of a Greek word which has the particular meaning of one who is not a member of a state or city. It is used here in a general sense of being foreign to a thing, having no share in it. The “*covenants of promise*” are the covenants of Messianic significance which God entered into with Abraham and the patriarchs.

To this covenant the Ephesians, in their lost condition, had been strangers. While it is true that the blessing of the Gentiles was included in God’s covenant with Abraham, according to **Genesis 12:1–3**, God did not make any covenants with the Gentile **nations**. At that time, God had never revealed Himself to them as their special Friend. And because the Jews had robbed God’s covenant of its real, spiritual meaning, and had substituted for it the hope of earthly glory, they had not even been able to convey to the Gentiles the glory of God’s promise. We find evidence of this in the words of our Lord recorded in **Matthew 23:13-15**: “*But woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You keep locking people out of the kingdom of heaven! For you neither enter nor permit those trying to enter to go in. “Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You cross land and sea to make one convert, and when you get one, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves!” (New English Translation)*

Before they were saved, the Ephesian Gentiles had been **friendless** and so were we.

The **fourth** thing was that they were **without hope**. Paul refers to them as “*having no hope.*” This follows very naturally, for the hope of the Christian is based on the divine promise. Since, as we have just seen, the Gentiles were “*strangers from the covenants of promise,*” they lacked any assurance of salvation.

Such hope is one of God’s most precious gifts. In **1 Corinthians 13:13**, hope is mentioned together with faith and love as one of the three things that will endure. Hope is a knowledge of God’s promise coupled with a confidence that His promise will be fulfilled. It is the conviction that all things will be well, even when all things seem to be going wrong. Hope never fails, it never disappoints, because like faith and love, it is a divine gift. In **Romans 5:5** Paul writes, “*And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (New English Translation).*

In their lost condition, the Gentiles in Ephesus had lacked this hope. Not only were they devoid of the Messianic hope which was one of the distinctions of the Jew, they were utterly without any hope whatsoever. They were completely ignorant of Jesus Christ and the salvation that He offered and so, they had nothing to hope for beyond this world. Instead, they had been filled with fear and despair.

Before they were saved, the Ephesian Gentiles had been **hopeless** and so were we.

The **fifth** thing Paul lists as being true of these uncircumcised Gentiles before they encountered God's grace, was that they were **without God**. Paul informs us that they were "*without God in the world.*" It was not that they did not worship any gods prior to their conversion. As we stated earlier, they worshipped the goddess Diana. But they were without the knowledge of the true God. And without the knowledge of the one true and living God, they were in reality destitute of any God.

In **Galatians 4:8**, Paul writes the following to the Christians in Galatia: "*Formerly when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods at all*" (**New Living Translation**). Like the Galatians, the Gentile Ephesians had served and worshipped gods who were powerless. They were in truth "*without God in the world*" in the sense that they had been without the true knowledge of God, and therefore, without holiness, righteousness, peace, and the joy of salvation.

Baker New Testament Commentary, in commenting on the Gentiles being "*without God in the world,*" makes the following observation: "They had resembled mariners who without compass and guide were adrift in a rudderless ship during a starless night on a tempestuous sea, far away from the harbor. Nothing less than that is meant by the gloomy, awe-inspiring phrase 'without God in the world.' That world is the mass of fallen mankind, lost, sin-laden, and exposed to the judgment."

Before they were saved, the Ephesian Gentiles had been **Godless** and so were we.

In **Ephesians 2:11-12**, Paul reminds us of the condition in which we walked as unbelieving members of this world. He tells us that we were separated from each other. We were at animosity with each other. All of these damaged relationships are the result of sin.

If Paul was writing today about the Jamaican context, he would have written about the "haves versus the "have nots;" inner city residents versus "up-towners;" "brownings" versus "blacknings;" comrades versus labourites; or even church denomination versus church denomination.

The Grace Workshop Ministries should be a place where the deepest divisions are dealt with in Jesus Christ; a place where loving confrontation is used to resolve conflicts, a place where we fellowship our differences. And the only way that these things can happen is if the gospel of the grace of God is preached, taught, understood, believed and applied to every area of our lives.