

Ephesians 13-11-17a

This is Sunday, the 17th of November, 2013. We're in the book of Ephesians. We're in chapter 2. Last time we took an excursion over to Colossians and saw the thought sequence that was in the mind of the Apostle Paul and in his heart through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and how these two complement each other so well and why he directed that they be read and every place where one was read, the other was to be read also.

We'll pick up now and take a look at chapter 2, the first 13 verses in particular. But let's take a moment at the outset to ensure that our hearts are prepared, that we're susceptible to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit and that we're fully equipped to learn from the things that are before us. Father, we thank You for granting us this day and all of the grace that attends it, Your provision, Your protection, Your watch care over us.

We thank You most of all for the Lord Jesus who has transformed us, has transformed our lives, has created in us and for us such wonderful potential. We thank You for Your love in sending Him on our behalf and for including us in Your eternal purposes for the ages, not deeming us discardable but granting to us the tremendous gift of eternal life. We thank You for the truth that is in this passage we find from the pen of the Apostle Paul and we ask Your blessing on us as we study it together.

May God the Holy Spirit find us ready pupils and impress on each heart not only the truth but its pertinence and application in our individual journey through this life. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's read this and load it up into our working space so that we can analyze it effectively. Having covered the things that we have studied in great detail in Ephesians chapter 1, all of the blessings that are ours in Christ, Paul finishes that thought and as I've mentioned, I think the chapter break is a little bit unfortunate here. But we'll begin where our Bible breaks it.

And you who were dead in trespasses and sins, He made alive, I strongly encourage you to scratch that out. I know the translators were trying to help us but it's not necessary. I think it actually impedes it a little bit.

And you who were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked according to the course of this world according to the prince of the power of the air the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience among whom also we once conducted ourselves in the lust of our flesh fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature children of wrath just as the others. But God who is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us even when we were dead in trespasses made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved and raised up together and made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in

Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast for we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them therefore remember that you once Gentiles in the flesh who are called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands that at that time you are without Christ being alien from the commonwealth of Israel strangers from the covenants of promise having no hope and without God in the world but now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Okay, I'm going to suggest to you that there are no accidents in the wording of Scripture that there are no casual choices would you tend to agree? All Scripture is God breathed every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God one jot and one tittle will not perish it will all be fulfilled Jesus said so with that in mind and if you're not squeamish about marking your Bible I would encourage you to note the following pronouns in verse 1 of chapter 2 second word you you who were dead in trespasses and sins verse 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world prince of the power of the air spirit works in the sons of disobedience sons of disobedience the sons of disobedience seems to be a separate group why because Paul is addressing the saints verse 1 to the saints you're either a saint or a son of disobedience right so the sons of disobedience that's somebody else so we just note that the sons of disobedience are some group separate apart from what Paul is talking about among whom also we verse 3 we all once conducted ourselves just make a note he has changed persons here he was doing second person you you you like the Ames brothers you now he says we this is first-person plural ourselves by nature we were children of wrath and a verse 3 just as the others who are the others draw a line back up that's the sons of disobedience the others it's not anybody we're currently talking about the sons of disobedience those are the others but God who is rich in mercy because it is great love with which he loved us first-person plural us even when we verse 5 were dead in trespasses made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved why does he say by grace we have been saved you why does he change pronouns in the same verse so just note it at the beginning God loved us we were dead in trespasses and sins made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved and even though the us is in italics twice in verse 6 that this is legitimate based on the the case based on the the construction here that this is parallel it is legitimate even though there is no pronoun in the Greek text it it follows raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus so we'll go ahead and use those even though they are implied rather than explicit it's legit if they're they're okay but that's an us that's a first-person plural that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus us circle it verse 8 he returns for by grace you have been saved he why does he keep changing person here us you us you you we you by grace you have been saved through faith this is the second time he has changed pronouns to second person when he's been talking about we in us by grace you have been saved through faith in that not of yourselves y'all you to whom I am speaking to my writing to my talking yourselves it is the gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast verse 10 for we are his workmanship he's changing person again we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which got prepared

beforehand that we should walk in them we not you therefore remember that you verse 11 he's changing person again you were Gentiles in the flesh uncircumcision called that by the circumcision made in the flesh by hands at that time verse 12 you were without Christ you were aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel you were strangers from the covenant to promise you had no hope you are without God in the world but now in Christ Jesus verse 13 you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ I I want to suggest to you that this is not just variation for the sake of variation or variety Paul is being very careful in designating not one group of unsaved being saved in Christ but two there's we and there's you in his mind there is we and there is you and this is not accidental he very carefully with malice of forethought has chosen his pronouns under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so let's just say that's the case which no commentary wants to touch because these verses have been used to support so much systematic theology systematic theology major talking here so much of this has been used to undergird soteriology Christology ecclesiology eschatology that nobody wants to go rewire the whole system but let me just suggest let's just let's just try this out let's let's test it as a hypothesis that Paul knew what he was doing when he switched these pronouns what would they designate think about it what would they designate and what's the best way to answer questions that come to our minds when we're addressing Scripture where the answers almost always to be found context context context in this context who would you be and who would we be you be we be who would who would the you who would the you be he says doesn't he you Gentiles verse 11 in the flesh you were called on circumcision by we the circumcision it's pretty clear about the two groups who are now in the church who have been united in Christ everyone's in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek remember that but he says in times past we the circumcision called you the Gentiles the uncircumcision right so this would be a working a working definition for you versus we how can Paul say we I am a Hebrew the Hebrews circumcised on the eighth day Pharisee sat at the feet of Gamaliel schooled in the law persecuted Christians I am a true blue red-blooded Jew Israelite right so he can confidently say we and as you go from verse 11 forward I mean this distinction is just drawn out very starkly very emphatically is it not so with that in mind let's see if we can make this work let's suppose that you are the Greeks who have now come into faith in Jesus Christ and that we are the Israelites the former Jews who have now come to faith in Christ and that's you and we we are the saints in this group let's just see if we can make that work you ready we'll start in verse 1 and you Gentiles who were dead in trespasses and sins in which you Gentiles once walked according to what the course of this world do you remember the Israelite view even in their worst day they understood the distinction between themselves and the rest of the world they've always been the circumcised and you guys are the uncircumcised they could not even go into the land until Joshua stopped at Gilgal and circumcised them and they waited three days before they went on to Jericho remember that that's their distinctive it's their heritage it's the sign of the covenant going all the way back to Genesis with Abraham this is the sign of the covenant if you're not circumcised you're not in the in the nation you're not of the people this is the sign in the seal of the covenant with God you are God's covenant chosen people there are many nations in the earth but I have taken you God says for my own so you walked according to

the course of the world according to the prince of the power of the air the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience that spirit that formerly controlled and dominated and influenced you as Gentiles is still working in the sons of disobedience sons of disobedience is anybody outside the church that spirit is still at work outside that perimeter if you think of the church as a circle in which you get a mixture of Jews and Gentiles outside that circle there's your sons of disobedience that's where the prince of the power the air has his influence has his permission to reign he has that permission from God no king has authority except as granted by God Satan only has authority in this world because God has allowed it so the spirit who now is now working in the sons continues to work in the sons of disobedience he's not working in you anymore why you're now church you're inside the ring of fire among whom we verse 3 also we Jews we Israelites all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh notice the difference the people on the outside the Gentiles they're subject to the principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness this age the prince of the power the air that spirit it's an outside influence against which they have no inoculation they have no defense Satan can work his will with them we Paul says conducted ourselves not under the influence of the prince of the power the air what got us was the lust of our own flesh if the enemy was us it was internally was within our problem was the flesh we weren't necessarily under the domination of the evil forces at the air the invisible influences the controlled by Satan we got ourselves it was our own corrupt nature the tripped us we conducted ourselves in the lust of the flesh fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature children of wrath by nature not by influences not by externalities our nature got us and our nature brought us under the same condemnation as those who were outside two different groups one subject to the vagaries of the prince of the power the air the other allegedly the people of God but tripped up and sold under sin by the flesh it was our nature that brought us under the same condemnation two different attempts one Satan do your best make this into a make this into a people who are worthy to survive you know you think angelic conflict God says alright you think you can be God you can raise your phone above the stars you'll be like God I'll give you all these people you can be God to them you're their God work your will on as long as they're disobedient don't wanna come to faith they're yours do what you will I'm gonna take these here but I'm gonna make a demonstration of the fact that even though they are mine and even though they're under covenant without some sort of deliverance just having a covenant relationship with me is not enough just coming under my instructions in the law by the law comes the knowledge of sin under the law we recognize that it's not enough to simply accept relationship with God we need some sort of transformation and the whole history of God's people in the Old Testament is one of knowing God accepting God and believing in God isn't enough to qualify us to live forever with God we need something more than that it isn't enough to assent it isn't enough to believe it isn't even enough to trust we need transformation we need a salvation that goes beyond simple entering into contract relationship with God and that's what that's what Israel represents so with me so far outsiders they're operating under Satan's influence well that just brings them under wrath under judgment because look at how horrendous it is out there his system utterly totally completely trends toward evil and disintegration and corruption and vileness

and every heinous thing his best efforts he's in the realm of death apart from God there's only death and everything is going to die it's zombie land out there okay well we also we in the covenants in the house of Israel got tripped up from within it wasn't Satan that was our problem it was us that was our problem so we were by nature children wrath just like the others but God who is rich in mercy because his great love with which he loved us with which he loved us now it doesn't mean that God doesn't love the whole world but what Paul is focusing on here is God's love was toward Israel who are the promises to in the ancient world does God promise the world anything who is promised a Messiah who is promised a deliverer who is promised a recompense to enemies and a permanent home and a permanent heritage a land flowing with milk and honey rest and peace on all sides and a son of David sitting on the throne forever is it the world or is it Israel God's love in the Old Testament was expressed in and toward Israel Israel is called by my name Israel is the place of my presence Israel is where the tabernacle and the temple and the Shekinah dwell God basically had no truck with the Hittites and the Hivites and the Archites and the Jebusites and all the otherites the Moabites and the Edomites and the Ammonites the Ninevites doesn't say God loved them even when he sent Jonah there it was just a demonstration of how willing they were to turn at his reproof where is God's love stated throughout the Old Testament age it's Israel God who is rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us this is Israel he's talking about even when we were dead in trespasses what is the technical definition of trespass it is crossing a line it is breaking the rule it is breaking the law we were dead in trespasses we Israelites had laws and rules from God that we were covenant bound to obey and we broke them we were dead in trespasses notice it doesn't say and sins because in this context not to say that that isn't true but in this context Paul is talking about I think he is contrasting Israel and the Gentiles and he says you all were dead in the realm of death prince of the power the air death we inside thinking we were so holy and so well off we were dead in trespasses but God in mercy loved us first loved us primarily this is the focus point God knows that in and through Israel and in and through a Jew all the earth is going to be saved Jesus is a Jew but it comes in and through Israel so he says God loved us even when we were dead in trespasses he made us Jews alive together with Christ this is a part of God's covenant contract this is a part of God's promise to Israel God obligated himself to save and to make alive Israel did he make that covenant obligation to the rest of the world did God ever promise to save the whole world he told Abraham that he would be a blessing to the whole world but did God ever promise anybody other than Israel a future a heritage an everlasting King God never promised anybody by that so what is Paul break off to say here God had mercy on us God loved us God made us alive together with Christ look it's by grace that you have been saved you Gentiles God had no contract obligation to you at all it's pure grace that he saved anybody but Israel now if you don't think that that understanding it this way puts a finger in the eye of the Calvinist approach because all you gotta do is substitute the elect and the unelect for Israel and the rest of the world and the same principle applies God obligated himself God made a promise to Israel I will deliver you David will not lack a man to sit on the throne your seed will be as the stars without number their contract promises salvation for Israel is a matter of contract salvation for the Gentiles at this point

is a matter of pure grace pure grace and so Paul breaks off he says look you know we had we had a thing going with God we had a history with God we've been his people for for centuries and millennia you guys it is pure grace that you got saved by grace you have been saved see that see the implication there let's continue and raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus he raised us up together he made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness the Hebrew for this would be chesed loving kindness loyal love in Christ Jesus God's original purpose God's stated purpose in sending Jesus Christ his stated purpose was to save Israel what did the angels say at his birth what is the what is the the song of Zachariah and the song of Mary what are they talking about it is the Messiah Jesus is the Messiah what's his name Jesus Christ what is Christ what does it mean in Hebrew it's Mashiach that's Christos the anointed one anointed as what anointed to Israel anointed in Israel anointed son of David son of David have mercy on me the son of man has come to seek and save that which was lost I am sent to whom the lost sheep of what I am sent only Jesus said I am sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that's we that's us God sent Jesus originally primarily as fulfillment of his promises to Israel he is the fulfillment of the law who does the law teach who does the law picture truth for the Day of Atonement the the Levitical offerings and sacrifices the feast days what do they all picture the Lord Jesus coming and fulfilling God's promises to Israel those feasts weren't worldwide God didn't say go teach all nations to follow these offerings and ritual sacrifices it was for Israel in Israel to Israel for Israel about Israel Jesus is sent to Israel and in Christ we Jews we Israelites are raised up together made to sit in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus and that would have been all that God had to do to fulfill all of his Old Testament promises the blessing to the nations could have just been blessing by association just having you around is is a light and a wonderful thing for by grace you have been saved God had no contract obligations he made you no promises Gentiles outside the Commonwealth of Israel by grace you have been saved through faith and that didn't come from yourselves it was a gift of God not of works lest any man should boast what's the biggest problem in Israel they've got a system of works and they boast in their works all the time remember the rich young ruler Lord I want to come follow you well what do I need to do well keep the law I've kept the law for my youth works not of works it is a gift of God lest anyone should boast the biggest problem in Israel is boasting in works this is why the Pharisees couldn't see for the blind scales over their eyes blindness from the scales on their eyes verse 10 for we are his workmanship we Israelites we have been created just like the temple just like the tabernacle we are a structure that God created we're the Ark of the Covenant set in the midst of the world we're his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works those are the works detailed in the law those good works were specified this is good this is not thou shalt thou shalt not we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus with a view toward good works which God prepared beforehand the beforehand makes sense now doesn't it that's what was given in the Old Testament has been given since the days of Cain and Abel there's a right way to do a sacrifice in a wrong way there are good works which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them these obligations weren't on the Gentiles God doesn't condemn the Gentiles

because they don't do their sacrifices right or because they marry more than one woman or they covet and steal and lie that's not his condemnation of them God prepared good works for us Jews us Israelites beforehand that we should walk in them therefore now look at how this argument turns in verse 11 therefore remember that you once Gentiles to whom this stuff didn't apply look at the distance away from God that you started out God didn't prepare any works beforehand that you should walk in them God didn't make any covenant promises to you beforehand that he would fulfill in Christ he had no obligation to raise you up in the heavenlies with Christ that was that was us that was the privileged Israelites you once Gentiles in the flesh were called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands this is a physical distinction in the earth we are physically distinct from you we are hereditarily distinct from you Abraham is our father remember that at that time you and why does Paul emphasize this point now because that's what he's been emphasizing all along at this time you were at that time you are without Christ aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel everything he's been talking about applies and pertains to the Commonwealth of Israel strangers you were strangers from the covenants of promise you had no hope and you are without God where in the world in the world not in the Commonwealth not within God's Old Testament ring of fire but now verse 13 in Christ Jesus you who once were far off you why doesn't he say we weren't they equally far off if you turn this whole situation another way of course everyone was far off you're just as far off as Paul says as the sons of disobedience if you're trapped by the desires of the flesh you're giving into the to the internal enemy but he's making a point to the Greeks he's purposely saying look you know the Jew had an advantage in every way remember Romans 9 10 and 11 look at Israel look at all their advantages stewards of the mysteries of God stewards of the of the of the Word of God remember that he talks about all the advantages but they fell short the branches had to be broken out and the others were grafted in that's Paul talking looking at it another way but here he's talking to the Greeks to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus in this whole region where Colossians where Ephesus is where Laodicea is these are largely Gentile communities very few Jews there and so he's saying look let me explain to you don't let these Judaizers tell you that you've got to join the Commonwealth let me explain how your salvation came about you were outside but this is what God has done in Christ for you remember you Gentiles in the flesh called uncircumcision by the circumcision made in the flesh you are without made in the flesh remember he talked about how they were in the grip of the flesh and even this Lord it over you look down the nose distinction was fleshly you were called uncircumcision in the flesh because we were in the grip of the flesh we were sinning and looking down on people and disdaining everyone because we falsely puffed ourselves up thinking because we were the people of God we had a better thing but no at that time you were without Christ you were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel strangers from the covenants a promise no hope without God in the world now in Christ Jesus you Gentiles who were once far off out in the world have been brought near by the blood of Christ verse 14 for he himself is our peace who has made both one the you's and the we's here's where you get the combination here's where you now have the common truths they don't begin back in verse 1 they begin in verse 14 he himself is our peace and this is where our now includes

the Gentiles who has made the both one has broken down the middle wall of separation that middle wall of separation I would suggest he has been describing all the way through this chapter having abolished in his flesh his flesh the enmity we had enmity in our flesh in his flesh he abolished it the supercilious superior arrogant attitude the Jews had toward the Gentiles in their flesh Jesus took that into his flesh and it's just like when Jesus touched the dead or when he touched the unclean which way did the transfer take place Jesus took that attitude in his flesh and eliminated it disappeared it vanished it that enmity is gone the law of commandments ordinances and created in himself one new man from the two one new man from the you and the we one new man in Christ this is this is another great in Christ truth that these things that were so severely separate inside and outside the you and the we is one new man making peace and that he might reconcile them both to God reconcile them both the one that had the covenant promises going all the way back to Adam and Seth and Noah and Shem and Abraham Isaac and Jacob in this whole line of promise line of promise don't we call it that the seed of the woman the line of promise and then everybody else now reconciles them both to God in one body through the cross putting to death the enmity the division the separation the distinction that he's been drawing out in the church age that demonstration that under Satan corruption and judgment ensue and even when contract relationship with God judgment and corruption ensue Christ has come and put an end to that twofold demonstration and now there is a single demonstration that doesn't have that that two-part element both reconciled to God in one body through the cross putting to death the enmity and he came and preached peace to you who were far off look at verse 17 and to those parentheses of us who were near far off and those who were near any purposely doesn't say we who were near why because he's saying that's historical there were those who were far off and those who were near now it's equal opportunity that distinction is eradicated this ought to really appeal all the people that are against you know discrimination on any basis there's no greater universal potential universal opportunity than there is in Christ it doesn't matter if you're Jewish doesn't matter if you're Gentile doesn't matter your history your background or anything else it's an equal opportunity invitation in Christ is made the two one we both have access and notice how when he uses we this time we both we are one unit now we the Gentiles we the Jews have come to faith in Christ it's we the church it to me it just seems like a really beautiful use of pronouns here and really draws out the distinction and glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ look at how great the work of the Lord Jesus is not just coming in fulfilling a promise to a limited few the elect so to speak of Israel but to everyone those who were far off outside the Commonwealth outside the covenant promises have been brought just as near as those who were in the covenants and promises but trapped in their own flesh the Lord Jesus Christ has made it equally possible for all of us to be reconciled and have peace with God the Father it's just a tremendous tribute a tremendous beautiful painting of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for the world let's pause and take a break when we come back we'll see how Paul uses this truth to make a point of application in the rest of this chapter