

I'm often in awe of God's amazing timing. I thought this year I might do a special message for Thanksgiving week. When I began to pray about it, the Holy Spirit reminded me that we have been praising God for all He has done for us since we started this Ephesians study. It began with praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for blessing us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. All the way through last Sunday, chapter 2 verse 10, we've been doing just that. We've been recounting all the spiritual blessings we have in Jesus and had our eyes open to some we didn't realize we had, or at least didn't recognize the greatness of them.

Without going into detail, here is the list of things for which Paul was praising God. We were chosen before creation to be holy and blameless. In love God predestined us to be adopted into His family. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus! (Romans 8:29) God blessed us with lavish grace, redeeming and forgiving us through the blood of Christ. He showed us the mystery of uniting everything in Christ. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit who also guarantees that we will inherit all things. (1Corinthians 3:21-23) We will bring glory to God. We receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know Christ more fully. The eyes of our heart are enlightened to see the riches of our inheritance in the saints. We are being transformed by the power of resurrection that raised Jesus. We are Christ's body and He is our head. In Him we fill all in all!

If you aren't a child of God and haven't had your eyes opened to the depths of these amazing declarations, it just sounds like a mumbo jumbo. (1Corinthians 2:14) But if you are in Christ, these are indescribably wonderful gifts for which we will forever praise God with a heart of gratitude. (2Corinthians 9:15)

Paul wasn't done. In chapter 2, he started with a reminder of where we came from. Gratitude is magnified by the distance we have come, from death in a self-destructive lifestyle to a life that is rich with eternal significance and relationship. (Jeremiah 29:11) We were made alive with Christ in His resurrection and seated with Him in the heavenly realms at the right hand of God! We experienced the riches of God's grace and His kindness expressed in Christ. We are saved by grace through faith, a gift of God. He even planned good works in advance for us to do.

We have a tradition in our home that before we enjoy the Thanksgiving meal, we go around the dinner table and tell of something for which we are grateful. It is usually our spouse, our children, our health, an answer to prayer, and someone will inevitably say, "Jesus!" It's because of Jesus that we have all of those spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms. I suppose if we each said something from the above list, a guest might think we'd lost our minds or joined a cult. But since Paul had the mind of Christ,

Commented [notes1]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Commented [notes2]: 1 Corinthians 3:21-23 (ESV)

²¹ So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Commented [notes3]: 1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Commented [notes4]: 2 Corinthians 9:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Commented [notes5]: Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

shouldn't it be the new normal for us? (1 Corinthians 2:16) I'm very grateful that I have every spiritual blessing in Christ! That's my answer this year. Maybe next year it will be that I'm seated with Him and in Him at the right hand of God Almighty! Too lofty? It's reality, and the believer recognizes and appreciates it. What are you most grateful for? (Ephesians 5:20)

Commented [notes6]: 1 Corinthians 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? EBut we have the mind of Christ.

Commented [notes7]: Ephesians 5:20 (ESV)

²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Paul still wasn't done praising God. He continues in our passage today by pointing us to the Messianic Jewish perspective of what transpired when we were included in Christ by grace through faith. 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 our inclusive society today, it's hard to imagine the animosity Jews and Greeks held toward each other. Commentator Kent Hughes says, "The Gentiles were dogs in Jewish parlance, and the Jews were homicidal enemies of the human race in Gentile terms."⁸

Commented [notes8]: Preaching the Word – Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ.

While circumcision was from the beginning only an outward sign of a covenant that was to take place in the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6), Jews saw this as the distinguishing mark that made them different from the rest of the world. Paul points out that there is the physical which is performed by man, and in doing so he reminds his readers that it is something man does as opposed to the work in the heart that only God can do.

Commented [notes9]: Deuteronomy 30:6 (ESV)

⁶ And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Paul reminds us that we were once separated from Christ. He isn't just stating the obvious. Christ is the mystery of which Paul speaks. He is the Word of God that was from the beginning. He is the Word through the prophets. He spoke to Moses on the mountain and from the Ark of the Covenant through the veil. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:14) We were separated from the Word. Since the Word is a lamp, without it we were walking in darkness. (Psalm 119:105)

Commented [notes10]: John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Commented [notes11]: Psalm 119:105 (ESV)

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

We were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. Living outside the chosen people of God, we did not have the rich history and constant discussion of the things of God. To live among the people of God was to share and apply the stories and to interpret daily life in the light of God's past dealings with them. Instead, we interpreted life from an ungodly mindset of selfishness.

We were strangers to the covenants of promise. Abraham's descendants are blessed, and whoever blesses them is blessed. Whoever curses them is cursed. (Genesis 12:3) They had the covenant on Sinai and the covenant of circumcision. They knew where they stood with God and his promises to them. We didn't have the promises and didn't know God.

Commented [notes12]: Genesis 12-3 (ESV)

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

In other words, we were without hope and without God in the world. They had God and so they had hope. All who are without God are hopeless. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, healthy or sick, intelligent or not; without God you have no hope. You can enjoy life for a time, but age and decay are going to catch up with you, and all you lived for will come to an end. (Luke 12:18-20) That's who we all were. Once again, Paul is contrasting where we were to show us how far we've come in Christ.

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. We were far away from God and the things of God but in the Messiah Jesus, we've been brought near to God and joined the family of God. Now we have His Word to illumine our path, and are part of the commonwealth of Israel, and we are even heirs of the promises given to Abraham. (Galatians 3:29) Now we have God and so we have hope in this world, not in the systems of man, but in the marvelous plan of God who will bring everything together under Christ, the Alpha and Omega. (Revelation 22:13)

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility Jesus is our peace. He made Jew and Gentile one in Himself, Messiah to Israel and Savior of us all. He became the sacrificial Lamb whose blood covers all our sins. (John 1:29) Messianic Jew and Gentile believer now share the same God and Savior, and so have become a new race.

In the days of Christ, in the temple area, there was a small wall around the temple sanctuary. Gentiles could come into the outer court, but on that small wall were signs that read, "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." An archeological dig actually uncovered two of these signs. Access to God was forbidden to Gentiles. They could pray to Him, but they could not enjoy the ceremonies of worship or approach the Holy of Holies where the presence of God resided over the Ark of the Covenant. Paul is saying that little wall has been broken down! The veil that kept all out of the very presence of God was torn from top to bottom. (Mark 15:38)

How did God change the whole system? He actually didn't change it, but brought it to completion in Christ. *¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,* By fulfilling the requirements of the law on our behalf and imputing righteousness to all who believe, the function of the law became obsolete. (Matthew 5:17) The law was a guardian to bring us to Christ. (Galatians 3:24) It taught us that we could never be good enough for a holy God (Galatians 2:16), that we needed God to intervene and make us holy. (Exodus 31:13) When God did just that, salvation and

Commented [notes13]: Luke 12:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.
¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.
²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

Commented [notes14]: Galatians 3:29 (ESV)

²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Commented [notes15]: Revelation 22:13 (ESV)

¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

Commented [notes16]: John 1:29 (ESV)

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Commented [notes17]: Mark 15:38 (ESV)

³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

Commented [notes18]: Matthew 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Commented [notes19]: Galatians 3:24 (ESV)

²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

Commented [notes20]: Galatians 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Commented [notes21]: Exodus 31:13 (ESV)

¹³ "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.'

peace with God were made available to all. This is demonstrated today in Christian communities in Israel, the only place in Israel where Jew and Arab worship together without fear of one another. They are a living example of the truth of the new race!

He did this so He ^(16 and) might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. The Jew no longer has to shake of the dust of his clothing after traveling through Gentile lands. The Jew in Christ need no longer fear the Gentile in Christ.

It has taken the church a long time to get back to the understanding that the church is not the enemy of the Jew. The unfulfilled Jew as an heir of Abraham has some special promises that apply to them, but there is no salvation other than through the Lamb of God, the Messiah of Israel. (Acts 4:12) The prophecies speak of a day when they will look on the One they pierced and mourn as when one mourns for an only child. The survivors of the attempt to annihilate those in Jerusalem will all accept Jesus as their Messiah and He will come and save them. (Zechariah 12:9-10)

Today, Tel Aviv is as secular as any big American city, and only the most orthodox of Jews are looking for the Messiah. The Time of Jacob's Trouble will change that. (Jeremiah 30:7) Are they still God's chosen people? I don't see anything that says the promises to them have been nullified. With only .2% of the world's population they have received 192 Nobel prizes. By contrast, the Arabs account for 20% of the world's population and have won only 9 Nobel prizes.

Are Jews saved because they are descended from Abraham? Not until they accept the Messiah can they know the salvation He offers to all who will believe. It is the children of faith that inherit the promises. (Romans 4:13) Now it is the unfulfilled Jew that is separate from Christ and without hope in the world. One day that will change.

Back to our text we read, ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. We Gentiles were far off because we did not have God's word, the history of God's revelation to man, and the covenants and religious rituals that foreshadowed the Messiah. The Jews were near because they did have these. Jesus came and preached the Kingdom of God. Even the Old Testament prophets foresaw the day when the Gentiles would hear and receive the Messiah. (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6)

The message to us both is peace with God through the atonement of Jesus' sacrifice of Himself in our place. (Isaiah 57:19) He is the Lamb of God who died not just for the Jew, but for the sins of the world. That is peace with God for Jew and Gentile. When we are at peace with God we are at peace with one another, joined together in the family of God. (John 14:27) We are both now heirs of the promises to Abraham for we

Commented [notes22]: Acts 4:12 (ESV)

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Commented [notes23]: Zechariah 12:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

¹⁰ And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Commented [notes24]: Jeremiah 30:7 (ESV)

⁷ Alas! That day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it.

Commented [notes25]: Romans 4:13 (ESV)

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

Commented [notes26]: Isaiah 42:6 (ESV)

⁶ "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,

Commented [notes27]: Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)

⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

Commented [notes28]: Isaiah 57:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and to the near," says the LORD, "and I will heal him.

Commented [notes29]: John 14:27 (ESV)

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

are both children of faith. (Galatians 3:29) We are joined together in Christ, the commonwealth of the true Israel, the heirs of the covenants, and recipients of the promises. We have a great hope even in this world, for we have every spiritual blessing in Christ and are seated in Christ at God's right hand. The Holy Spirit that sealed us in Christ guarantees our inheritance. What a great hope we have! And even in this world we enter His kingdom and are being transformed by the resurrection power of Christ. No wonder we have peace in our hearts and peace with God. (Romans 5:1) What an incredible, immeasurable thing Jesus did for us through His death and resurrection!

But here is the best thing of all! ¹⁸ *For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.* Because Jesus has sanctified us through the blood He shed on our behalf, we receive the Holy Spirit. Whether we were born Jew or Gentile, the Spirit gives us access to God. We come through Christ to God by the same Spirit. The trinity is plain to see in this verse. Through Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, we access our Father God.

Our prayers are received and the Spirit even adds to them what we cannot express. He intercedes for us according to God's will. (Romans 8:26-27) It is the same Spirit within us that makes us one. We are praying the same things because we are praying according to the will of God. Now, for both Jew and Gentile it is all about the glory of God.

Jesus came and preached peace to us. True followers of Jesus may have their peace disturbed, but they cannot remain in that state for it is not the normal state of a believer. The Spirit will make us uncomfortable until we return to peace with God and our fellow man. We apply the access through the Son by the Spirit to the Father to ask for forgiveness and the strength we need to remain at peace with Him and with one another.

Peace should be one of the telltale marks of the genuine believer (Galatians 5:22), not the sappy peace of being pacifistic toward evil and nonconfrontational, but the very peace of Christ that interjects the gracious love and truth of God into our situations. For the Spirit's aid in this, for our access to God, we can be truly thankful. May God bless you with an awareness of all we have in Jesus our Lord this Thanksgiving week!

Questions

- 1 What should we be thankful for to this point in the letter?
- 2 Why contrast it with what we were?
- 3 What were Gentiles missing?
- 4 What did the blood of Christ do for us?
- 5 What was Paul's illustration of peace?
- 6 How was that possible?
- 7 What is our relationship to the Jews?
- 8 What will happen to them?

Commented [notes30]: Galatians 3:29 (ESV)

²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Commented [notes31]: Romans 5:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes32]: Romans 8:26-27 (ESV)

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Commented [notes33]: Galatians 5:22 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

- 9 Who was far off? Near? Why?
- 10 Who is our peace? Results?
- 11 What does access to the Father mean?