

God Gives to All

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[0 : 00] Do you guys like that song? That is old school. It's the closest to a hymn you're probably going to get in this service.

Although, to be fair, we are starting to sing a lot of hymns, at least the words to old hymns, to new music, so I'd really dig that. But that's what, 1984?

Old. It's really good to be with you. If you're new, my name's Jono. I'm pastor of this congregation. We'd really like to get to know you guys, so please make sure you do fill out those Connect cards and hang around afterwards for some supper.

It's great to have you here tonight. If you are new, we're in week four of a nine-week series we're doing through the Book of Ephesians. Just to recap, get you up to speed, the first week we really just saw that the Book of Ephesians is a big-picture book and we got a big-picture view of salvation. So we saw that God has been working since before anything existed, before the foundations of the world is the way that Paul talks about it, to bring to himself a people that he could call his own, a people whom he would save from sin and Satan and themselves.

[1 : 17] And he's going to bring that plan to fruition right into eternity future. That's what we saw in Ephesians 1, 1 to 11. Then we saw that Paul kind of zooms in on the church and we learnt that it's not enough really just to know the gospel, but we need to know it better and better as we grow in our faith and maturity.

God wants us not just to know the basics, but to grow in deeper love and affection with Jesus as our Saviour. Then last week we saw that God incredibly, amazingly, brings about his plan of salvation by grace.

That is that we can't do anything to earn his favour or his love. We can't tick a list of things that will get us close to God, that will get us saved.

Actually, salvation comes by faith, by grace alone through faith. And that's God's gracious gift to us in Jesus. And then tonight we're going to see how God has worked through Jesus to bring about peace where there was enmity and togetherness, where there was division.

It's a beautiful chapter tonight that we get a real insight into what God has done in the past and what he's doing today to mend the brokenness between people and between us and himself.

[2 : 38] It's a beautiful thing. I want to pray for us before we start. So let's bow our heads. Father, I do pray that you'd be with us tonight as we look at your word.

We thank you for Ephesians 2, verses 11 to 22, which speak of your work to bring about peace, peace in our relationships with one another, and peace between us and you.

So we pray that you'd be with us and speak to us. You'd bless us in Jesus' name. Amen. A couple of years ago, 2008, Renee and I went to Southern Africa.

We didn't really need to go to Southern Africa to meet South Africans because half of our church are South Africans. But anyway, we thought these people were really nice. And I've loved nature documentaries since I was a kid, and I just wanted to live it.

So we went for five weeks to Southern Africa, travelled around, did the game parks, just soaked up the culture in Southern Africa. And we started in Cape Town, a beautiful city.

[3 : 46] You've got to go to Cape Town, go up to the top of Table Mountain and look over that bay area. It's just a beautiful, beautiful place. Everywhere we went was just brilliant.

But one of the really dark and sad things that we experienced when we were there was going to the Apartheid Museum in Cape Town. It's just this little museum, a little old building, and it's full of photographs and accounts of Apartheid, the segregation that existed between black and white South Africans back in the day.

And I'd learned about Apartheid at high school in history, and I'd read about it, and I was familiar with it. But to see the photos and to read the accounts and to meet people who experienced it on both sides of the divide was just so moving and so real and so vivid that I can just recall now. The photographs, the accounts, the lady who was taking us around, her experiences of being a black South African during the time of Apartheid.

It was just heartbreaking. One of the great and dreadful divisions between humans in our recent history. And it's not unique, is it?

[5 : 05] It's not just that South Africans are terribly bad people. I mean, there's been divisions between people, between races, between cultures since time began. And tonight, as we look into Paul's context in writing this part of the letter, we see one of the great divisions between people that has ever existed, and that is the division between Jews and Gentiles.

And then also we're going to see the division between people and God. And that's the context that we come into in Ephesians chapter 2. So why don't you turn there, if you haven't already, 9.50.

We're going to take it slowly, walk through this. It is important just to see the context before we start. So Paul's context, as I said, was living in a society where Jews and Gentiles, that is, people who aren't Jews, Greeks, pagans, the other people, were very much divided.

There was a great chasm that existed between these people culturally, but particularly religiously. So the Jews were the people of God, the Gentiles were not. We're going to see that a little bit more fully as we go along.

But it's important also to see that this passage really exists on two levels. So there is that local context that Paul is speaking into, but there's also the bigger universal context.

[6 : 27] That is that, just like the Gentiles in that day, we ourselves, every one of us, to some degree experience division between us and other people, don't we? There are people that you are cut off from because of some kind of hostility, enmity, argument.

And every one of us in some way, and particularly if you're here and you're not a believer in Jesus, you are cut off from God in a very real and profound way.

There is a chasm that exists between us and the God who gives life to us, the God of the universe. So I want us to see this passage in both of those contexts.

So let's do it. Let's just start at verse 11. He writes this to the Ephesian church. So then, remember. He wants them to remember that at one time, you Gentiles by birth called the uncircumcision by those who are called the circumcision, a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands. He wants them to remember something. These are Gentiles who once didn't know God and now do know God. They were once pagans, irreligious, worshipping all kinds of false gods. Now they worship Jesus and he wants them to remember the time before they became Christians.

[7 : 51] He wants them to remember that at one time, they were called the uncircumcision by those who call themselves the circumcision. That is, the Jews who call themselves the circumcision, circumcision being a symbol of being a member of the people of God, a symbol of knowing God, being part of a covenant community with God.

They called these Gentiles the uncircumcision, the great unwashed, the non-believers, the people outside of God's blessing and covenant and favour.

So he wants them to remember that time when they were cut off from God and when they were cut off from the Jewish people. And he wants them to remember five aspects of their status as being a Gentile.

Five non-June negatives as I've got there in the notes. So let's look at them. I'll just read them for you. The five that are here in verse 12, that being that they are without Christ, without citizenship, without covenants, without hope, without God.

So that's verse 12. He says, Remember that you were at one time or at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[9 : 18] So let's take those one at a time. He says, You are without Christ. Remember that you were at that time without Christ. This means they were without an understanding of the Messiah.

So the Jewish people had an understanding of the Messiah. This was going to be a man of God who would come, who would bring salvation, who would liberate them, who would bring a time of blessing and prosperity and peace and oneness with God.

And these Gentiles, they didn't know the Messiah. They had no Christ. That's number one. Number two, they were without citizenship. So he says, they're being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.

They were not members of the people of God. Remember Genesis 12, God calls Abram. He says, I'm going to make a nation of you that's going to bless other nations. And that's what happens. Out of Abram comes this whole race of people called the Jewish people, the people of God, the people of Israel. And they were a people who were going to be God's own people. He was going to bless them.

[10 : 22] He was going to bring them into the land where they would experience blessing and oneness with him. The Gentiles aren't part of that people. They're not part of that nation.

They're not the people of God. They are without citizenship. That's what he means when he says, being aliens. Sorry, when he says, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, not members of the people of God.

So they're without Christ, without citizenship with God. And thirdly, without covenants. It's also verse 12, and strangers to the covenants of promise.

He's saying that you are ignorant of the covenants of promise, that God promised to Abram, that God promised to David. These are covenants whereby God would promise to his people that there would be a time where they would enjoy his blessing, favour, prosperity, oneness with him.

And they weren't privy to those promises. In fact, they were ignorant of them. Strangers to the covenants of promise. Number four, therefore, they are without hope.

[11 : 38] And strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope. They have no hope because they have no covenant. They have no promise. They have no oneness with God.

They have no promise of a Messiah. No future hope beyond death. God is not actively speaking into their lives, into their community.

They have no church to be a part of, no temple to worship in. No hope. And finally, most importantly, probably number five, without God in the world.

They didn't know the God of the Bible. They didn't know the one true God. They had heaps of gods. They had gods for everything, the Greeks. But they didn't know the God, the one true God.

Remember in Acts 17, Paul says, to the Gentiles, to the Greeks, you've been worshipping an unknown God. And he goes on to tell them about the God of the Bible. That's the situation here.

[12 : 39] There is this unknown God that they're not aware of, that they're not worshipping, that they're not bending their knee to, that they're not obeying. They do not know the one true God who gave them life, who sustains their life, who makes promises.

So they're without Christ, without citizenship, without covenants, without hope, without God. All of this was true of them before they came to know Jesus.

And then he says, but now. Remember last week we had this great verse, verse 4, but God. And now here we have, but now.

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

That there was this great chasm between these Gentiles and the one true living God. There was this great division between them and peace and oneness with God.

[13 : 48] There's this great division between them and the promises of God, the covenants of God, the great Messiah of God. But now, that chasm has been closed.

How? By the blood of Christ. So that's the then and the now. He's saying, then it was like this and now it's like this.

And really, this is the situation that everyone who doesn't believe in Jesus finds themselves in today. This is right up to date. It's not, you know, ancient and without relevance to us today.

Every unbeliever is exactly in this position that he's talking about. If you don't trust in Jesus, if you haven't been saved by Jesus, if you don't acknowledge Jesus as the one true God, you are without Christ.

You have no part with the people of God. You don't have citizenship. You're without covenants of promise. There's nothing to hold on to beyond the grave.

[14 : 56] And therefore, you're without hope and without God in the world. This is the situation that all of us have found ourselves in at one time or another before we decided to follow Jesus.

And then Paul says, but now that chasm has been closed for you who trust in Jesus. And how has it been done? This is what he gets on to now. How and why?

How has this been done? He says, by the blood of Christ. Sounds like a real Sunday school answer, doesn't it? How has Jesus brought us to be with God, the blood of Christ? But the question is, how does that work?

It sounds a little bit weird to us today. Someone died, shed their blood, so now you can be with God. It doesn't necessarily click for us in our situation. So he goes on to explain how and why this has come about.

And he gives us three steps that God has taken to bring about peace. Peace between humanity and peace between humanity and God.

[16:04] Peace is the most important word in this passage. You get it three times in verse 14, verse 15 and verse 17. Verse 14 he says that Jesus is our peace.

He is peace personified. He doesn't just bring it, he is peace. Verse 14. Verse 15 says that he has made peace.

And verse 17 says he has proclaimed peace. And there's three steps that he takes. Step one, he breaks down a wall. let's read verse 14.

He says for he, that's Jesus, for Jesus is our peace. In his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us.

He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances. in order to bring peace between Jews and Gentiles, God acted through Jesus to break down the wall of hostility between us and Paul says here that that wall is the law.

[17:20] He abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances. If you've been around church a while or you know your gospels really well then you might be starting to question what Paul's going on about here because Jesus himself in Matthew I think it's 5.17 says that he didn't come to abolish the law.

That not one word of the law would disappear because of him. And so what Paul is saying here is not that Jesus abolished the law entirely but that he abolished the law insofar as it is a barrier between Jew and Gentile, between Gentile and God.

He's abolished that barrier. He's broken down that wall. The law insofar as it was a barrier between us. Jesus broke that down by his blood shed on the cross.

That's step one. Break the wall. Step two. Make one out of two. Second part of verse 15 says that God might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace.

You've got these two groups that are divided, irreconcilably divided in so many ways, Jews and Gentiles. And what God did when Jesus died by his blood was make one group out of the two.

[18:53] And it wasn't that new Christian Gentiles became Jews. And it wasn't that Jews lost their heritage or their identity as the people of God.

But God took two separate people and made a whole new humanity. A whole new humanity.

It's like when you get married. You have one man and one woman and they come together and they make one flesh. One plus one equals one when it comes to marriage.

And one plus one equals one when it comes to Jew-Gentile relationship before God. He's made two nations one.

He's made two races one. He's made two humanities into one humanity. And we saw that tonight, didn't we, in our first reading. Isaiah chapter two, verse one to five.

[19:50] five. That's just a prediction and a picture of what we see coming about in this verse. That you've got all these nations coming to worship the God who is the God of one nation, Israel.

That the nations come together to worship God together and they turn their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks.

There's no more hostility between the nations. They're all there to worship God together. That's what Paul has in mind here. That's what God has done through Jesus.

He's taken nations, peoples, humanities who are at odds with different gods, different cultures, hostile towards one another and he's made them one new humanity.

So that's step one, break down the wall of the law. Step two, make two separate peoples into one new humanity. Step three, he's got to kill his own son.

[20:55] Verse 16 says this, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

If you think about a cross, it's a helpful way to think about the cross and what it achieves. If you think about the two beams of the cross, crossing over one another, and in shedding his own blood on that cross, Jesus makes peace between us and God, that's the vertical beam.

There's peace between us and God where there used to be anger and wrath, as we saw last week. Now there's peace and love. peace. But there's also in the cross beam, peace horizontally between humanity, amongst ourselves.

That peace comes through Jesus' blood between me and you, between cultures and people who used to worship different gods. You see a beautiful picture of that at this church with so many different cultures, people of different backgrounds.

Peace is brought through the blood of Jesus. So often we concentrate on the vertical aspect, which is really important, paramount. But we need to know that Christ brings peace between us as well.

[22 : 15] And all throughout the New Testament you get that over and over again. The writers talk about having peace with God but also with one another. We saw last week again that you can't say you love God and then hate your brothers and sisters.

The Bible won't allow it. God brings peace vertically and horizontally. That's what it means that he brought peace through the cross. He brought it between both us and God and between one another.

Monumentally between Gentiles and Jews but also for us today. Just as Jesus was put to death so the hostility between us is put to death.

And so now we've been given access. God's. Let's read 17 through 18. He says, so Jesus came and proclaimed peace to you who are far off and peace to those who are near.

For through him both of us have access in one spirit to the Father. This is a beautiful line. Let me explain it to you. In the past only the Jews had access to God and then only through rituals and rites and ceremonies, only through the sacrificing of animals.

[23 : 32] And even though God was in the temple, there was a curtain that divided them and only one dude could do it once a year. The high priest could approach God himself. And so when Paul says that every one of us have access to God because of what Jesus has done, that is a massive thing.

And you notice he includes in those who have been given access, both Jews and Gentiles. That's what he means when he says to you who are far off, that's Gentiles, you never knew God, you didn't have covenants, promises, citizenship, hope, anything.

You had nothing. You are far off to you and to you who are near, that is the Jews. Many of whom presumed on their lineage to bring them close to God, many of whom didn't know God but presumed that they would be okay because of who they were as Jewish people, many of whom relied on works of the law in order to bring them close to God rather than faith.

He says to you who are far off, didn't know a thing and even you who are near, who are members of the people of God who had circumcision, to all of you, you've been given access through one spirit to the Father.

Father. And it's a beautiful picture here of the Trinity. Do you notice that? He says at the start of 17, so Jesus came and proclaimed peace, etc.

[25 : 04] For through him, Jesus, both of us have access in one spirit to the Father. There's Son, Spirit and Father all there in that little package.

It's a beautiful picture of the Trinitarian gospel that everyone has access to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through what Jesus did on the cross.

So what? What does it mean? What does it mean for us today? Paul's going to get to that in this last section.

We've seen the then and now, we've seen the how and why now, so what? It's a good question to ask when you come to the Bible. So what? What difference does this make?

Let's read it, 19 through to the end. He says, so then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

[26 : 13] In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

So he's been speaking to the Jews and the Gentiles, grouping them together as one people with access to God, but now he turns back to the Gentiles in his church in Ephesus.

So these are the people who were pagans, far off from God, turned to Jesus, got saved, started a church. He turns to them now, you notice that he says, so then you. He's been saying we, now he says you.

So he's addressing them, he says, you are no longer strangers and aliens. You used to be strangers, you used to be cut off from the nation of Israel, but no longer.

That divide has been conquered. Access is available to you. I wonder if you know what it feels like to be a stranger, an alien.

[27 : 21] I remember I went travelling a lot when I finished high school around 2000, 2001, travelled a lot on my own and it was really great.

I mean, I got to see a lot of things, experience a lot of cultures. Every day was different. I didn't know where I was going to sleep, what I was going to eat, who I was going to come into contact with.

It was really exhilarating. But after a while, it starts to become very depressing because you constantly feel like you don't belong anywhere, even in western countries.

I was constantly feeling like an outsider, not knowing anybody and getting to know people for a time but then moving on. That's what it's like to feel like a stranger, like an alien.

It's depressing, it's dark, it's lonely. I can remember after a long period of just wandering around, I was on the flight back to Australia, 30 hour flight, and we were coming into Melbourne and it was on Qantas, back when that was the only option.

[28 : 31] And on Qantas, as you came into Melbourne airport, they would play the video of I Still Call Australia Home, right? Which is, you know, you cringe when you see it on the ad but when you've been away for what seems like ages, it made me cry.

Seeing these pictures of kangaroos. and the pilot was saying, you know, welcome home and you come into the airport and you get to line up in the Australian aisle to go through customs and you hear Australian voices and you suddenly realise that you belong somewhere, you're back where you belong, you're a citizen of this country.

It's such a beautiful feeling to feel at home, to be with your people. What Paul is saying here is that you used to be aliens, you used to be strangers, you used to not belong, but now you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints, that is the believers.

You're citizens with the believers and are also members of the household of God. It would be enough as an alien, as a stranger, to feel like you belonged in the nation where you lived, but he goes beyond that.

He says you're not only citizens, you don't just have citizenship in God's country, but you're also part of his family. That's what it means when it says also members of the household of God.

[30 : 10] We would have been happy enough just to know that we were part of the people of God, members of God's nation and country, but he's gone a step further and made us members of his family.

Gentile members of his family. And then you know what? He goes a step further than that. You're not just citizens of the nation, you're not just members of the family, but you and me make up a spiritual home for God, that we don't just live in his country, but he lives in us.

Verse 21 and 22, in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also, even you, even me, are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Old Testament times, God dwelt in the temple, in the physical temple, temple, and you could only go there if you were a Jew, but now, because of Jesus, God dwells in a spiritual temple.

God dwells in us. We dwell in his country, we're members of his family, and he lives in each one of us. Every one of us, at one point, were completely and utterly disconnected from God, from his favour, from his promises, from his Messiah, from all hope, from God himself, and the division wasn't just cultural, it wasn't just racial, it wasn't apartheid, it wasn't even Jew Gentile, it was infinite, but God sent his son to die on a cross, and because of his blood, the chasm has been closed, the division is gone, you're no longer a stranger, an alien, you are a member of God's household.

[32 : 20] I think this is what this means for us tonight. is that if you're here tonight and you don't know Jesus, you don't have faith in Jesus, maybe you don't know much about Jesus, maybe you're ignorant to the promises of God just like these Gentiles were.

The point is that you can never be too far away from God for him to welcome you in. These Gentiles, these Greeks, they had no idea who God was.

They had never heard the Christmas story, the Easter story, they'd never read a Bible. They worshipped other gods, they were hostile towards God's people, the Jews, and therefore to God himself.

They were without hope. Even if you're here tonight and you have done terrible things and you have terrible sin and darkness and shame in your life, you know Jesus, you know about him, you know of him.

You've heard tonight how he died on a cross, sacrificed himself in order to bring you peace. You know Christmas, you know Easter, you've got a Bible in front of you, you are so much closer to God than these people were and the point is God could bring them in and he can bring you in too.

[33 : 55] Paul says in this letter that in this passage that one of the ways that God brought about peace between those who are far off from God and God himself was as Jesus preached, proclaimed peace, verse 17, so he came and proclaimed peace to you who are far off.

Now Jesus didn't preach to these people. Don't be misled. Jesus was in heaven when this was going on. The Ephesians didn't get preached to by Jesus. He was dead.

He was raised to life. He was in heaven. What Paul means is that Jesus spoke through his apostles, through the preachers of the day. As they went out and told people about Jesus, Jesus was speaking through them and that's how he brought about peace.

I'll tell you what, that's why we have this time every Sunday night to preach. Because we trust that even very average preachers like me come up here and talk.

It's not just an exercise in public speaking, it's Jesus speaking through us as we speak. That it's Jesus proclaiming peace to those who are far off, to those who are hostile towards God.

[35 : 22] That's why we do it. So tonight as you hear this, know this, that Jesus is preaching peace to you.

You are not far from God. You could be the most dreadful, wretched sinner in the world and you are not far from God. He desires to have peace with you and to open you up to his promises, covenants, his hope, most of all his Messiah, Jesus Christ.

If you want peace with God and therefore peace with those who are around you, God wants to give that to you as a free gift.

God God God offers it to you. So what I want you to do if you do want to become a Christian, I want you to write down on the connect card that you want to know more about Jesus, that you want to give your life to Jesus or you want to have more conversation about this whole issue of salvation, I want you to mark that down and put it in the bowl as it comes around.

Tonight would be a great night to have peace with God forever. All right, let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

[36 : 55] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. God, tonight you have given us a beautiful picture. That even though all of us exist at some level with enmity and anger and hostility dividing us from one another and from you and even though we were far off from you, not being born into the covenant family of Israel, not knowing about Jesus as our Messiah, not having the covenants of promise, literally all of us without hope and without God in the world, that despite of all of that and because of that you sent your son into the world so that by his blood he might bring about peace.

peace. We thank you that you've brought peace horizontally and vertically that is between ourselves and between us and you.

Amen. our Father, please help us to know that peace and to rest in it now, to know that you do love us, that you have saved us, that anger and wrath will not be our destiny because Jesus has saved us by his blood.

I pray that you bring everyone who's here tonight, into relationship with you, relationship with peace and blessing and promise.

[39 : 09] We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.