

Eph. 2:11-22 - From Spiritual Nomads to Heavenly Citizens

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Preacher: Chad

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

If I could add to what Will said about our session retreat this weekend, in my marriage to Annalise, we have good days, we have bad days, and at the end of every day, it's good for us to know that each loves the other.

Maybe some of you all are in difficult spots. You are discouraged about where we might be as a church right now, discouraged about the future. Let me tell you, you have officers who love you. They love you deeply. They want you to know that they've been praying for you. They're continuing to pray for you. It was truly an honor to watch that occur this weekend, and Will and I have the opportunity to get to tell you that from the pulpit on behalf of our session and our deacons. You are loved and cherished, so please know that. If you will turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 2, Ephesians chapter 2 verses 11 through 22.

[1 : 13] We're going to finish the chapter 2 in Ephesians this week. So far in chapter 2, Paul's been talking a lot about our state and our sin, how we were dead in our sin, and we have now been made alive in Christ.

We were dead in our trespasses, but God's love intervened. It entered into our broken situation, and while we were yet sinners, Paul tells us, God saved us.

So, Paul's going to continue in that same vein. He's going to continue to talk about this position, this standing that we have before God, before we knew Him and the standing that we have with Him now that we are in a relationship with Him through Christ.

He's going to conclude this chapter with an explanation not only of sin and its indictment, but particularly the history that the Ephesians have as Gentiles.

The Ephesians were Gentile people who were not connected to the historical people of God, that is the Jewish people. Paul's going to talk about what the implications are and what the glorious news of the gospel is in the midst of it.

[2 : 21] So, look with me at Ephesians chapter 2, verses 11 through 22. 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.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ. Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility, 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.

And it might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And He came and He preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

[3 : 47] Built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Let's pray. Father, no wisdom, truth, or power comes from us.

No wisdom, truth, or power is going to come from the emotions, the feelings of our heart. No wisdom, truth, or power is going to come from the thoughts of our mind.

Wisdom, truth, power are only contained in Your Word. So would You give us a right posture now as we consider Your Word? Would You help to open up our minds, open up our hearts, help us to see the bad and the good news of the gospel as we consider Your Word this morning?

Father, would You allow me to get out of the way to proclaim nothing but Your truth, Your glory, Your peace, and Your gospel from this pulpit for these things in Your heavenly and righteous Son's name.

[5 : 01] Amen. Brotherhood is one of the most special, most lasting relationships that God gives us. I have a younger brother whose name is Andrew, and we could sit all day, and I could tell you all kinds of great stories of things that Andrew and I did, the memories that we had as brothers.

We played lots of baseball together. We played lots of basketball together. We played matchbox cars when we were little. We wrestled when we got bigger. We laughed together. We ate lots of food together.

We watched TV shows and movies together. We had a very special bond. I can tell you lots of great memories, but there's also certain memories in my relationship with my brother that I'm not as quickly to tell you.

It's memories where my sinful state came out, when I would lord my size and my power over my little brother. We would play a game every now and then where the object of the game was to hit the other person as lightly as you could.

I always met my brother go first, and he would take his fist and very lightly tap my shoulder, and I would rear back and hit his shoulder as hard as I could and walk away and say, oh, guess I lost that game.

[6 : 15] It was awful. The way that I would lord power over him. I wanted to dominate him as much as I could. Aside from the games that we would play that involved physical pain, I remember a particular isolated event at a local arcade.

I was probably 10 or 11 years old. My brother was 6 or 7 years old, and I had spent all of the money that I brought to the arcade. I remember after spending my money looking at my brother, and in his hand was a fistful of quarters.

Knowing full well what I was doing, I was able to convince my brother that what you really want are the tickets. The tickets are what gets you the prizes from back behind that desk, and you know who could really get you the tickets well?

I could. Those games are kind of boring. You don't know how to play them. Why don't you let me play for you? And he handed over probably \$5 worth of quarters to his brother. It was awful. It was terrible.

I had an idea of what I had done to him in that moment, but I didn't truly realize, I didn't understand what had happened until I looked over and I saw my dad on the other side of the arcade room.

[7 : 21] He had been watching the whole thing, and he walked over and he gave me a new context for what had happened. He helped me understand in that moment what the definition of taking advantage of someone was.

I had taken advantage of my brother's weakness, his age. I had convinced him of this ridiculous idea, right? I needed my dad to help me understand the implications of what had transpired.

I needed his perspective to know just how sinful my heart truly was, that I was capable of doing something that awful, that I was that separated from the father in my actions.

I needed the perspective that my father could give. The same is true for the Ephesians. Paul is going to be like my father was in that scenario, and he's going to speak to them and tell them, you don't naturally on your own have the ability to truly understand who you were.

You don't have the ability to naturally understand what the implications of your history was as Gentile people, but I'm going to give you a perspective. He's going to give them a perspective they wouldn't otherwise have.

[8 : 30] He's going to tell them about this far-reaching, chasm-creating differences that are cast between us and the father because of our sin. The Ephesian people quite often forgot, just as we forget what life was like before we knew the father, just how helpless and hopeless we were.

Just prior in chapter 2, Paul has explained the indictment that we faced as sinners before God, and now Paul is going to explain what our history, what our background says about who we are before the father. Paul knows that the Ephesians' ability to recount and understand history is short-sighted. In the same way, when we consider our own personal history, what our life was like before God intervened into our situations, our tendency is to also be short-sighted. We want to soften the details of our sinful state. We want to curtail the story and tame the implications just a little bit, but Paul's not going to let us be comfortable.

He's going to unsettle us with the gospel and give us a perspective of what it meant to be Gentile people. We have Paul ready to explain what it's like being spiritual nomads, what it means to be a people who don't have a home, who don't have a people, who don't have promises in the world. So, as we look to understand more of our history, Paul first starts by explaining to us the separation that we have from God's company. He starts by telling us the separation that we have from God's company. His calling is for us to remember our roots, to remember where we came from. This is not a fun task. This is not easy to do. It's a grim history that Paul's about to recount. He first starts by explaining to us how, in our separation from God, we were denied the social and the political affiliation with God's people. The Ephesians are first referred to as uncircumcision. This was a social, political, and racially charged and sensitive term. It's one that clearly delineated the Gentiles from the Israelites. Paul is sharply reminding the Ephesian people that they're a foreign group, that their political system, their social status, their geographical history do not compare at all to that of Israel. This reference to the promise of circumcision was also a reminder to the Ephesians that they were wholly unclean, that they stood before the Father not clean, but wholly unclean, that they were denied this social, this political affiliation that being a part of Israel allowed.

Consider what Paul is saying here in the context of what he's already explained to us, that you Ephesians, Paul's already told us, have been raised up and seated with Jesus in heaven. But now he's coming back and saying, don't forget, you were actually separated from Christ. You're in Christ now. You're joined with Christ now. But don't forget, there was a time where you were completely denied the affiliation with God's people. Brian Chappell explains how God gave his theocratic state, he gave his people group instructions for justice, for worship and mercy, so that the grace of his character would be concrete expressions in the law and the life of Israel. What that means is that if you were a part of this group, then you just naturally understood in a unique way through the laws, through justice, and through the daily life of Israel what it meant to understand God's character.

[12:08] His character was displayed in this political, social group. There was once a time where you were denied this relationship, Ephesians, a time when you had no hope, when you had no affiliation with the people of God. There was a time when you all, Southwood, like the Gentile Ephesians, were not privileged to the benefits of an affiliation with the people of God. So Paul tells us that we are denied that social political affiliation. He also tells us that we were removed from the intimate community, the intimate community that is unique to the people of God. Paul says you were not a part of that.

We're described in this passage as being alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise. One of the greatest things that someone misses out on when they're not a part of God's people is the intimate community that it provides, a community that's coded in God's mercy and His grace. Relationships in the covenant community are marked by a love that's born out of God's example of grace. They're marked by truth. They're marked by selflessness. They're marked by commitment, and they're marked by intentionality. Intimate relationships in the covenant community of God are ones where we display His grace, and we work all the time to know other people and to be known. That's intimacy. And Paul's telling you, you were removed from that. You are not always a part of that. The intimacy that the covenant community provides is one where the glory of God is the chief goal. No other group can offer that. Paul references the historical relationships and agreements that God entered into with His people with one singular promise of grace that started in the

Old Testament and that carries now into the New Testament. He's referencing the covenants that included those with Adam, with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses, with Joshua, with Ezra, with Nehemiah.

The spirit of these covenants was the one in which land was secured. It's the one by which a man and a woman entered into marriage. It's the same spirit of these covenants that a mother and a father were called to covenantally bless and care for their children. God's covenants of promise

were the glue of loving and unified neighborhoods. They were the glue of loving and unified family units and communities.

It's through these covenants that God promised to send a Redeemer. Do you see how unique it is? How special this covenant community is? The intimacy that God had with His people and that God's people had with each other. As I entered into my freshman year of college, I decided to go the potluck method with a roommate. And I'm sure that you're familiar with that. It's basically your name is put into a big pool of names. And at Samford, where I went to school, they actually try to be thoughtful and intentional and pair people together. So I met my roommate the first day that I showed up my freshman year of school. My roommate's name was Andrew Kurek, and he and I quickly developed a great relationship. We shared tons of great memories. We shared our personal stories, our journeys, our struggles through the first year of college. We decided not to be roommates after that, but we stayed really great friends. He was in my wedding. I was in his wedding. We continued to have a great relationship. Later on in my time at Samford, my junior year, there was a series of events that had occurred in my life, and I knew that personally I was going to have to make a difficult decision.

[15:50] I knew a difficult decision was coming my way, and making this decision was going to mean making some enemies. It was going to mean facing trials and struggles that I had not anticipated. I might potentially lose friends. And as I faced the situation, I felt very alone. I felt lost in this struggle.

And I remember late one night standing on the Beeson Woods Bridge on Samford's campus and explaining my situation to my dear friend, Andrew. I remember him listening very carefully. I remember him asking thoughtful questions. I remember him agreeing that I was making the right decision.

I also remember Andrew sensing my feelings of aloneness, my feelings of uncertainty. And at the end of our conversation, my friend who had walked with me through so much, who had been a faithful friend, a loving friend, one who I knew, one who knew me, looked at me and he said, Chad, you need to know that I am so proud of you. In that moment, I understood what it looked like to live in a community marked by God's covenantal love. In that moment, I understood what it meant to be known, to be loved with grace and with affirmation. I understood what it meant for someone to faithfully come alongside me. I understood what it meant to dwell in intimate friendship.

I understood what it meant to do this when it wasn't convenient and it wasn't easy. In that moment, I understood the beauty of God's grace, the beauty of his covenantal love. Allow me to take an aside then, Southwood, and ask you, do you feel that sense of community here at Southwood? Is this a place where you feel that you can be open with your heart's struggles and your doubts, where you feel that you can be truly loved and cared for? Do you experience and then also express the intimacy that a covenantal community allows? Do you see God's character, his love being displayed as you dwell with this group of people? As the people of God, our community should and must be ones that are marked by genuine transparency, that are marked by this kind of intimacy. And they're actually only going to be shown here because we sit in gospel freedom.

It's okay to not be okay in these pews, and it's our desire that that would grow in this place.

Fostering that kind of community doesn't just take place from what I say or Will says from this pulpit.

[18:36] It starts in the pew. It grows organically. It's contagious. Are you displaying it well to others? My friend Andrew was and is a regular reminder of God's love to me. I was able to spend the evening with him last Monday. It was the first time that he and I had sat down face to face in over seven years.

And I can't tell you the sweetness of the connection that we immediately had. These covenantal bonds of striving for the same things, understanding and experiencing God's love in unique ways. We sat and we shared life together. Our wives got to know each other better during the evening on Monday. I felt the sweetness of what Paul is describing here, a community, a place that's unique, that's marked by God's love. We're told that before you knew the Father, you were removed from that kind of community, that you were separated from it. But now you get to experience it. So Paul tells us that we were denied that affiliation. We were removed from this community. And then he also tells us that we were distanced from the living God. The living God who could offer us life, who offered us hope, we were distanced from Him. This is the greatest, most crucial part of Paul's description, that we were separated from God Himself. This was not a partially severed relationship. This wasn't a weak relationship.

This was a relationship where the two parties didn't know each other. We were separated, removed from God. Last week, J. Scarlar described for us the mode of the psalmist as he faced his struggles, that he's trying to recall God's covenant love, His steadfast love, and His care. There's a practice of that as God's covenant people. The Gentiles were not able to do that. They couldn't remember a time when God was their God. They had been removed from Him, separated from the living God. Paul tells us that this separation leaves us without hope. It leaves us without hope in the world, completely desperate. No dreams, no ambitions, no longings, no fulfillment, no contentment, no peace. And so we're left at the end of these verses gasping for spiritual air, gasping to be a part of that community, to know that affiliation, to be connected with God again, to have hope. We ought to be waiting on Paul's good news. Like, is it coming soon, Paul? And here it is. Just as he did previously in chapter 2, he said, but God, and delivered the good news of the gospel to us, he tells us now, but now. The time orientation, the historical orientation has changed. That's in the past. You used to be that. Now you are this. But now. But now you are God's people because of what Christ did for you. He's explaining that your history, that God's association with you used to be this way, but now it's something totally different. His relationship with you is now restored. You now have hope again. You get to experience the restoration that Christ's ministry and that his blood brings. With clear imagery, we're told that God has taken these people who were far off, that were separated from him, alienated from him, that were denied access to the covenant. God has now brought them close. They were far, and now he's brought them near. We start to take a deep breath, a big spiritual deep breath of, okay, the story doesn't stop there. This work of Christ restoring our relationship with God happens in two parts. The first is our restoration in Christ. Paul wants to make sure before he goes to the cross and talks about the implications of the cross that we first understand that it was Christ who enabled this relationship, and we are connected to him. His death was our death. His resurrection was our resurrection. You are restored in Christ. You are united to him. Christ joins us to himself as he bore the penalty of death.

[22 : 51] The salvation side of the equation is given by and enabled by Christ. We are in Christ, meaning that we are Christ's benefactors. We're placed in and under the benefits that Christ's blood achieved.

They were accomplished by him, but credited to us. We are in Christ. This clause of Paul's signifies for us the personal, intimate union that we have with Christ. So, we are restored in Christ, but we're also restored through Christ, through Christ's work. Just as we're told that we are united to him, that we're in Christ. Paul explains the way in which we are united to him, and that is through his blood, through his sacrifice, through his cross. It's the blood of Christ and his sacrificial death which bridges this eternal gap that existed between us and the Father. It's the blood of Christ which eternally pardons our sin and thereby reconciles us to God and to others. And what was that experience like for Jesus on the cross? What was that experience like as he shed his blood for you, his people?

It was painful, right? He endured great suffering, great pain, great persecution, mockery, torment. And do you remember those words of Jesus on the cross? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He puts into words the anguish of his heart, the bloods being shed, and his cry is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He was taking on your sin in that moment. He was going to face punishment for you. He descended into hell, and he was separated from God. So, you know what that means? He could have actually said Paul's words. My God, my God, I am separated from you. I am alienated from the common wealth of my relationship with you. I feel as though I am a stranger to the covenants of promise.

My God, my God, I have no hope, and I am in the world without you. Do you understand what Jesus did? With his final breath, with his final words, Jesus took on the sin of the world, descended into hell, absorbed that punishment, and he cried out in separation. He experienced what we were as Gentiles, separated from God so that we might be brought near. Christ was sent far off so that we could be drawn near by the Father. Christ's nearness to God is union with the Father. His fullness of life and holiness is what we are joined in, and we are given through the cross. Jesus enabled God to take what was far and to bring it close again, to take his people who he had a perfect relationship with in Eden, who he was separated from, and now bring them close again. Verse 14 tells us that Jesus himself is our peace, that Jesus earned that peace, and that peace is offered to us in the gospel. We're told that he did this by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances. When

you read that, maybe that struck you. I hope it did. Why would Jesus abolish the law? That doesn't make sense, right? We would understand that he needs to fulfill the law, be what we could never be. He had a perfect obedience, an active obedience is what we would call it. So why would Paul say that? Well, there's a particular reference that Paul is making, and that is to the ceremonial law. The ceremonial laws were those things that governed things like material sacrifices, dietary regulations, and it governed rituals that determined who was clean and unclean.

[26 : 48] Sound familiar? Clean and unclean, circumcision and uncircumcision. So what Jesus was doing was, through his blood, through his shed blood, he was abolishing those ordinances. He was breaking down the wall that existed. Now all are clean because of their relationship to Jesus, not their affiliation with a people group. You are made right again, not because of anything you do, but because you've been made clean by Jesus. Do you see what Paul is saying? There is no longer now any distinction between Jew and Gentile, the circumcised and the uncircumcised. The condition of being separated and distanced from God. You don't have to worry about that anymore. You Gentiles receive all the benefits that God's people previously received. The same year that I met and developed that great friendship with my roommates was the same year that I was exposed to a, let's say, a very special, bless their heart kind of people in our society. It's people who have a lot of money, who are spoiled, they're entitled.

We call them trust fund babies. Kids who are just, they know that for the rest of their lives, they're set. They get to sit on mom and dad's wealth, the inheritance that they've given them.

There was one guy in my freshman class who lived in my dorm. He was a trust fund kid. And it seemed as though he was suspended from normal human responsibilities. Like, he went to college with us, but we never saw him in class. We never saw him studying. We never saw him in his room because he was driving around in his luxury vehicle or hopping on a jet and going to see his parents on the weekend in some tropical location. This guy lived an amazing life.

my friends realized that it would benefit them to get to know Richard. Richard was his name, and they selfishly decided that they were, whenever they could find Richard, they wanted to talk to him, see if they could get in on Richard's world. And so two of them succeeded. I don't think he realized what was happening, but these guys wanted a part of the wealth. And so sure enough, he would drive them around in his fancy car. He would take them on trips. He would buy them meals. He would buy expensive gifts for them. It was wild. We hated that that was happening, but we were jealous too, weren't we? Like, you know we wanted in on that relationship. We would have loved to have had all of that wealth. We would have loved to have been friends with Richard and received things that we didn't work for. We wanted all the joys, the pleasures, the highs of life without pain and sacrifice.

The life of a trust fund child. It's difficult for us, right? We want someone to earn it. Well, guess what? The gospel makes you a trust fund baby. The gospel makes you a trust fund baby. The unequivocally free grace of Christ given to us makes us benefactors to Jesus. Our relationship with God came at the cost of Jesus's life, but it doesn't cost us anything. We sit under the trust of the gospel. You are trust fund babies spiritually. The whole world was earned for you. God's righteousness was earned for you, and it was given as a gift. We all now receive the glorious riches of God's mercy and God's grace because of what Jesus did for us. Jesus lets us ride in the car with him. We get to take trips. We get to enjoy newfound and unearned freedom, life, intimacy, and joy with the Father once again. So my question is, how freely then do you live? Do you live as a trust fund kid, enjoying the riches of God's grace and mercy every day, or do you live enslaved?

Enslaved to a father that feels, that you feel is watching your every move, a father whose affections may change for you any day? Do you feel like a stranger, or do you feel like a child of our heavenly Father? Have you experienced God's grace in that way? Has it sunk in that you are a child of the trust fund? We see then thus far in this passage how our history has been changed, how our name, how our status has been transferred to Christ, and Christ has given us his righteousness.

[31 : 28] We've received all of his good works. They've been transferred to us. What should our response be then? Our final point is a very brief one, and it's simply to remind us of how this passage in this chapter concludes. Look with me at verses 20 through 22 at the end of our passage. It says that you, you Gentile Ephesians, you were built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. The means, the Spirit, and the purpose of our unity is Christ himself.

Christ brought down the wall of hostility. He breaks down the barriers that exist between us and God so that we might be forever united to this one Spirit, to the one and only Savior of sinful people.

This is a very striking picture compared to how Paul started. Our state, Paul said, was spiritual nomads.

We wandered without a people, without a home, without rights, privileges, structure, support, community, or hope. And now God has brought us into his people group. He's welcomed us into the banquet table of grace, but he's also done something else. He's done something that no one would expect.

He says, I'm going to take these nomadic people, these orphaned people who had no God, no hope, and guess what I'm going to do? I'm going to build my church with them. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't add up. Why would God use us? You know why? Because he's concerned about his son getting glory.

It's not about us. It's not about our righteousness or our works. He's concerned that his son receives glory, that we are unified together in that. This history lesson for Paul has now come full circle.

[33 : 33] The benefactors of grace are now called to be conduits of it. We're called to be God's people in the world now. I have a new people. It's anybody who receives me by faith. Now go, build yourselves up in Christ Jesus. He is the cornerstone, the one that holds all of it together. Go and be built up.

Do you see then our call to unity as a church? This is a recurring theme for Paul in the book of Ephesians. Do you see what we have to celebrate and be united by? This good news of the gospel, that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. God has extended his love to Jew and to Gentile.

The barriers are gone, and there is only one means by which we are saved, and that is Jesus Christ. Not your affiliation, not your works or your righteousness, but Christ alone. We all celebrate under this big tent of the gospel, and we are together a dwelling place for God to display himself to the world. Do you long to create a community that's unified by God's grace? Is it your desire that we would be unified people at Southwood? Do you long to create a place where our next visitor, our next hurting individual or family, our next broken-hearted, brow-beaten legalist, our next senior pastor enters this place and cannot deny that we are a people who have been changed by the good news of God's restoration through Jesus? Is that your desire? Do you want to be that?

The good news is here. The walls of hostility have been broken down. You now are united to the Father. Paul tells us that we can do nothing less, that we are called to be a united people, built up in Christ Jesus, built up in a place where God himself dwells. He is our peace. He is our unity. Let's live lives of joy and purpose because of it. Would you pray with me? Father, Father, this story doesn't make sense.

Why would you decide to love us unlovely, broken, dirty, sin-stained people? We don't know, other than the fact that you've decided to bring glory out of all of this, that you might shine brighter and greater and more powerful amongst your people in the whole world, but particularly, Father, your people here at Southwood. May you shine big and bright and beautiful.

[36 : 15] May the people who enter our doors understand the beauty of a covenantal community. May they understand the love and the grace that you first displayed in our lives that we might give it away.

Father, bring great unity out of this place, out of these people. May we make great strides and impacts for your gospel, for your glory, Father. Thank you for saving us, for being a God of great love.

Pray all these things in your heavenly son's name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. Thank you.