

What the Father Has Done for “All Men”

— *Ephesians 2:11-22* —

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Have you ever wanted to stay away from a party for fear you wouldn't be welcome? Many feel that way about going to God's "welcome party" for people who will live in His New Jerusalem. They are afraid of Him, innocently so. They would rather not even try to be saved. These people need to realize now that they are welcomed already.

The "welcome" is in Paul's letter to the Ephesians! It's spoken by the Lord through His word. He honors His word in the Bible. Jesus told the Jews that He said nothing of Himself, but only what the Father told Him. "I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak" (John 12:49). It was through the Bible, the actual Old Testament that Jesus held in His hands, that the Father spoke to Him. All the wonderful things that Jesus said in His ministry, He garnered from His reading of that Bible!

Likewise, when you let the Father speak to you through the Word, you will know the welcome is yours now as surely as when you hear Him repeat it in that coming glad day when you see Him.

As a review, we have read in chapter one of Ephesians how the Father has already:

1. "Blessed us [that's everybody!] with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." (The fact

that some people refuse the "blessing" doesn't mean it hasn't been given to them.)

2. "Predestined us to adoption as sons" (but of course we can refuse).

3. Enjoyed His "good pleasure" in doing this—that's the "fun" He gets in His plan of redemption. "(God deserves some "pleasure"!).

4. In Christ He has given us "redemption through His blood"—that is, past tense. The blood was shed for everybody; therefore all have been given that redemption, even if many reject it.

5. He has given us "the forgiveness of sins." The word means separated them from us (we can be stupid and take our sins back again! They were cast into the depths of the sea like the Titanic resting deep down; but people have retrieved things out of the Titanic).

6. He gives us as much "wisdom and prudence" as we are willing to receive (let's not shrug it off as proud "know-it-alls").

7. "He has made us accepted in the Beloved" (that's our "welcome!").

Let's not stop to question if all this is true for that could be unbelief; He has said it.

Ephesians 2:11-13: "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 were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who

once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.”

One of God’s favorite words is “remember.” For example, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8—the key to a life of endless happiness in the Lord!). Now the apostle tells us to “remember” where we came from in our “past.” Isaiah tells us to remember: “Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug” (51:1). Rather humbling memories!

The Lord reminded the great King David of his lowly origins. He told the prophet Nathan to tell him, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, that you should be ruler over My people Israel’” (1 Chron. 17:7). If David had always remembered where he had come from, he would never have fallen.

Now, says the Lord to us in Ephesians, remember your past, what it was like before you learned of your Savior. You knew nothing but the empty, boring “perishing” existence of the pagans with their drinking, sex orgies, and wild parties that left them drunk and disheveled with their hopeless deaths. “At that time you were without Christ,” says Paul. You felt like you were “outsiders” from the house of God, and you were! You knew nothing of the contrast between the New and the Old Covenants, and what was the good news in the New.

An idea that prevails quite extensively is that God has one covenant for Jews and another for Gentiles; that there was a time when the covenant with the Jews utterly excluded the Gentiles, but that

now a new covenant has been made which concerns chiefly, if not wholly, the Gentiles; in short that the Jews are, or were, under the old covenant, and the Gentiles under the new. That this idea is a great error, may readily be seen from the passage just quoted.

No Covenant with Gentiles

As a matter of fact, Gentiles, as Gentiles, have no part whatever in God’s covenants of promise. In Christ is the yea. “For how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea; wherefore also through Him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us.” The Gentiles are those who are without Christ, and so they are “strangers from the covenants of promise.” No Gentile has any part in any covenant of promise. But whosoever will may come to Christ, and may share in the promises; for Christ says, “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” But when the Gentile does that, no matter what his nationality may be, he ceases to be a Gentile, and becomes a member of “the commonwealth of Israel.”

Who Have a Share in God's Covenant?

But let it be noted also that the Jew, in the common acceptance of the term, that is, as a member of the Jewish nation, and a rejecter of Christ, has no more share in the promises of God, or the covenants of promise, than the Gentile has. That is only to say that nobody has any share in the promises, save those who accept them. Whoever is “without Christ,” whether he be called Jew or Gentile, is also “without God in the world,” and is a stranger from the covenants of promise, and an

alien from the commonwealth of Israel. This the text first quoted teaches us. One must be in Christ in order to share the benefits of “the covenants of promise,” and be a member of “the commonwealth of Israel.” To be “an Israelite indeed,” therefore, is simply to be a Christian. This is as true of the men who lived in the days of Moses, as of those who lived in the days of Paul, or those who live today.

The contrast in the two can be summarized:

1. The Old Covenant began with the entrance of sin in Eden. It's the system of salvation by our own efforts, based on the love of self. It's the system of our making promises to God, motivated by fear. All of us have been under the Old Covenant at some time. When Cain killed his brother Abel, what motivated him were Old Covenant ideas, while Abel had grasped the principles of the New. Even Abraham for a time languished spiritually under the Old Covenant before he found freedom in the New. The Old Covenant is the disciple Peter promising Jesus that he will never deny Him (but you remember how he did it only a few hours later). The New Covenant is God's promises to us—and our task is to believe them. The Ten Commandments become ten promises of victory over sin under the New Covenant.

2. When Israel left Egypt and arrived at Mt. Sinai, they unwisely promised God they would do everything He asked them to do—a thoroughly Old Covenant promise (Ex. 19:7, 8). There is pride involved. God had never asked them to make such a promise. He wanted them to choose aright, not promise. The people demonstrated for themselves

the futility of making the promise, for in just a few days they had forgotten and were kneeling down to worship a golden calf (32:1-6).

3. The people making the Old Covenant promises at Sinai set the pattern for much of Israel's later history up and down, mostly down, until they finally rejected and crucified their Lord of glory. Murdering the Messiah is not the fruit of a people believing the New Covenant!

4. Now Paul tells the Ephesians that in their pagan days they had known nothing of the joyous life there is in the New Covenant. “Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Paul's phrase, “the blood of Christ,” is a metaphor that evokes a heart realization of what it cost the Son of God to save us. His blood is His life, His soul, His very eternal existence which He “poured out,” gave up, for us (Isa. 53:12). Just the thought stretches our hearts (as David prays, “You shall enlarge my heart,” Psalm 119:32). While faith is more than superficial emotions which can be transitory, we cannot “survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died” without the heart being deeply moved, yes, constrained to commit “my all” to the One whose spilt blood we “see” with the eyes of faith.

We are a blood-bought people; by “the blood of the Lamb” we overcome (Rev. 12:11); by His blood we are “redeemed” (5:9); our filthy garments are made “white” in His blood (7:14); it “cleanses” us (1 John 1:9); by it we are “sanctified” (Heb. 13:12). That blood is “precious” (1 Peter 1:19).

That love (agape) revealed at the cross grips one for all time and eternity. A branch of Calvinism declares that if one is “once saved” he remains “always saved,” but this is perplexing. Paul does say that “agape never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8), which seems to suggest that if that kind of love has once been understood and has motivated one, he can never forget it, either for time or eternity. It’s not the once-saved-always-saved idea, but it’s the once-knowing-never-forgetting idea. The prodigal son couldn’t forget his father’s love. It’s possible for us to fall away and crucify Christ to ourselves “afresh” (cf. Heb. 6:6, KJV), but one who does so will be tortured forever by the memory of the precious birthright he has “despised” and “sold” (Heb. 6:4-7; 12:16, 17; Gen. 25:33, 34).

“Blood” is a sight that unnerves people; you would be devastated to see your loved one lying in its pool. The Lord Jesus Christ, rightly understood, is our “loved One,” “our nearest of kin” (cf. Ruth 3:12), the closest brother, the most intimately beloved Person we shall ever know. How can we see Him die when we know that the death He is dying is what brings Him the curse of God in our behalf? He has poured out His all, until there is nothing left of Himself, and it’s our death He is dying!

Now, says Paul, all of us once far-off people have been warmly embraced by His own heavenly Father. We are “in.” We have the run of His house—we are adopted children.

Ephesians 2:14-16: “For He Himself [Jesus] is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having

abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”

This reconciliation is far more than healing the mere trifle of Jews on the outs with Gentiles. Paul wants to face the cosmic issue. It’s the chasm, the “wall,” the “division,” between Heaven and earth that’s been “broken down” by the spiritual violence of Christ’s loving sacrifice. And the great task was accomplished “in the flesh” of Jesus. There in that “flesh” was the battleground of the universe!

Paul is also speaking of the “division” that formerly separated Jews and Gentiles. He is happy that Christ has “created . . . one new man from the two.” He now loves Gentiles as he once imagined that he loved Jews. We will be surprised at the people we will learn to love when we understand Ephesians more clearly!

Paul is also speaking of the “enmity” that was aroused even in Jewish hearts by the old ceremonial “law of commandments contained in ordinances,” the law that was swept away by Christ’s sacrifice on His cross. These ordinances prefigured the sacrifice of Christ, looked forward to it, so that when the true “Lamb of God” was sacrificed it would be unbelief to continue offering lambs or observing ceremonial sabbaths. “The commandments contained in ordinances” were not God’s eternal moral law of Ten Commandments.

But the “ordinances” were “a yoke upon the neck” (said Peter, Acts 15:10).

As the Son of God, Christ took into His human person this “enmity” of “the law of commandments contained in ordinances.” The word translated “division” is our word “fragments;” and “ordinances” is our word “dogma.” “Dogmatics” is the word that suggests the Old Covenant idea of stern, fear-induced demands (what multitudes mistakenly think is God’s law of Ten Commandments!).

Paul is not denigrating that “law of liberty” (James 2:12) which is the expression of God’s character of love (agape). That wonderful law stands throughout eternity. What Christ has abolished “in His flesh” is Satan’s popular distortion of that law. “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7), which means enmity against that holy law of God. What Christ abolished in His flesh is that enmity!

Luther confessed to his father-confessor Saupitz, who had told him that in order to find peace with God he was to “love Jesus,” “that the problem is, I hate Him!” For the first time in his life Luther confessed something true of himself. (That confession led directly to his conversion and his blessing the world with the Reformation.) It’s that alienation of heart that Christ abolished “in His flesh.” Now come close to Him and the “enmity” will be abolished in your “flesh,” too. That’s another word for the new birth.

To many this is a new thought—this biblical idea that Jesus experienced “in His flesh” the “enmity” that sin has brought into the human race. The “flesh” that the Savior “took” upon Himself is our

flesh, the only kind there is in this world, the real stuff. Since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden fell into sin, there has been no “holy flesh” anywhere in the world—not one exception, not even the Virgin Mary. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). The mother of Jesus could give Him no different kind of “flesh” than she herself had. So Romans says that “God [sent] His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,” that is, in His own flesh which He “took” (8:3). Thus, for Him to have taken our “sinful flesh” does not mean that He was a sinner—a million times, No! He “condemned sin in [that] flesh”! He is the only person who has ever done so perfectly.

Thus He forever conquered sin in the one place in God’s universe where sin had taken deep root. It was the grandest achievement in all eternity. Paul’s message in Ephesians is that Christ has succeeded in “creating one new man, ... thus making peace.” Who is that “new man”? Jesus! But you and I are “in Him.”

Ephesians 2:17, 18: “And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

The picture of this heavenly triumph is thrilling. Christ came “preaching peace” to people nearby and people afar off, all alike, and that peace is what solemnizes our hearts. Who is preaching today? The Son of God! Don’t ever say that you haven’t heard Him preach! He preaches through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who speaks through the

Bible. The message isn't legalistic burdens, "do this!" or "do that!" It's peace! You and I may kneel to pray to our heavenly Father in some far-off corner like Timbuktu, but never too far away for the Holy Spirit to indite our prayer, teaching us to say, "Father!"

Now note what happens: one Holy Spirit works, joining our hearts worldwide into "one body" as we pray to our one Father. It's a "Father/religion," for the Son joins us to Him, and the Spirit glorifies both.

Ephesians 2:19-22: "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation [dwelling place] of God in the Spirit."

Are you one of those blessed people known as "new believers?" I was once one! You feel strange: what will this new "family" be like? Did I make a mistake? What's involved in my new "membership"?

This dear man Paul is welcoming you, and telling you that you are now—careful, let's say it right!—way above the angels because you are now a member inside the "family," living in God's "house." The holy angels step aside as you pass by, for they respect you. There are two categories—"saints," which are people like you, and those mysterious "members of the household of God" who are not

classed as "saints." You have a lot of new acquaintances to meet!

You'd never think of abandoning this fellowship, would you? The Enemy would love to entice you away; take care.

Further, Paul says you are a permanent addition to the "building" under construction, one of the "stones" that will endure the ages. From now on Heaven looks upon you as a fellow-stone with "the apostles and prophets." Your name is inscribed, along with theirs. Now you will know a lasting thrill as you read Isaiah or Jeremiah, or wherever you read in your Bible: you are "kin" with those characters! Being in the "family," your contacts with every overcoming Bible author and character are more intimate than any video or movie could make them to be. Your Bible has become a new book!

And underneath you as a Foundation is that great Cornerstone, Jesus; the same "granite" that all the little stones are made of, because when He became the Head of the family He took the same flesh and blood, the same nature, that all of us have. And He has made us all to be "partakers of the divine nature."

Each "stone" is sentient, a living entity, each different than all the rest, each to be conferred with immortality at the coming of Jesus, each to revel for eternity in the peculiar and unique personality that he/she is "in Christ." All redeemed by "the blood of Christ."

We see that Christ is essentially the house of God, for "the whole family in heaven and earth is named" in Him. Thus He is the Temple, the Priest, and the

Sacrifice. He is the type, that is, the model or pattern, of the house of God.

1 Cor. 3:10, 11 shows just how this should be taken. There the apostle Paul says: "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

This text teaches that Jesus Christ is the only foundation; he is not only the chief corner-stone, but the entire foundation. Then how could Paul say to the Ephesian brethren, that they were built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets? He means the foundation which the apostles and prophets laid, as he says in 1Cor.3:10, that is, Jesus Christ as the Life-giver and the Saviour of sinners. That this is the foundation to which he refers, is proved by the second verse of the preceding chapter: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

The house "groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord," indicating that it is alive. It is built upon a Living Stone, upon whom believers "as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2:4, 5.