

EPHESIANS: GOD'S GLORY IN THE CHURCH (study 4)

Exclusion, enmity end – in the Ecclesia

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated (excluded, NAS; separated, NIV; cut off, Phillips) from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart ... -- EPH. 4:18 (KJV)

Study 4a: IF NOT IN CHRIST, WITHOUT GOD! (2:11-13)

2:11-12 By remembering what will Christians be moved to walk in good works? (vv. 8-10)

The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel ... It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world ... If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. [William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible* rev. ed 107]

Wherefore remember -- Such a remembrance strengthens faith, and increases gratitude. [John Wesley *Notes on the New Testament* 708]

[v.12] But at no period were the Ephesians, or any other Gentiles, destitute of all religion. Why, then, are they styled [atheo] *Atheists*? For [atheos] an *Atheist*, strictly speaking, is one who does not believe, and who absolutely ridicules, the being of a God. That appellation, certainly, is not usually given to superstitious persons, but to those who have no feeling of religion, and who desire to see it utterly destroyed. I answer, Paul was right in giving them this name, for he treated all the notions entertained respecting false gods as nothing; and with the utmost propriety do godly persons regard all idols as "nothing in the world" (1 Cor.viii.4.) Those who do not worship the true God, whatever may be the variety of their worship, or the multitude of laborious ceremonies which they perform, are without God: they adore what they know not. (Acts xvii.23.) ... Those who were formerly declared to be *without Christ*, are now declared to be *without God*; as John says, "Whosoever hath not the Son, hath not the Father," (1 John ii.23;) and again, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." (2 John 9.) [Calvin 234]

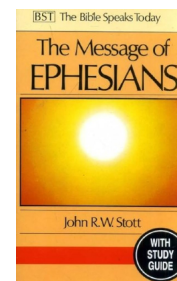
The Jew had a hope: the Gentile had none. The golden age of the Gentile was in

the past: his poets told him of it, and how it was gone. The Jew's golden age was in the future: his prophets told him to look forward to its coming ... This is the only place in the New Testament where the word *atheos* occurs. It is in no contemptuous sense that the Apostle speaks of them as having been "atheists", or "godless". It was the simple and sad description of their actual state, not indeed from their own, but from the only true point of view. [Robinson 57]

... *without God* -- wholly ignorant of the true God, and so in effect atheists. Such in truth are, more or less, all men, in all ages, till they know God **by the teaching of His own Spirit**. [John Wesley, *op.cit.*, 708]

2:13 Who ONLY are not "far off" and "without God in the world"?

Meanwhile, it will be wise for us to observe well the phrase "in Christ Jesus" with which he introduces his whole exposition of Christ's reconciling work. It is not a universal reconciliation that Christ achieved or that Paul proclaimed: it is rather a nearness to God and to each other gratefully experienced by those who are near Christ, indeed "in" him in a vital, **personal union**. This means, as John Mackay expresses it, when commenting on these verses, that God's integrating principle for uniting human beings is neither intellectual (philosophy) as in Roman Catholicism, nor political (conquest) as in Islam or Marxism, but spiritual (redemption by Christ, involving **union** between Jews and Gentiles, man and God and ultimately heaven and earth). These are three alternative "imperialisms", the first of mind, the second of force, the third of the kingdom of God. [Stott 98, emphasis added]



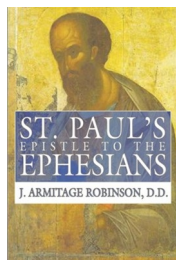
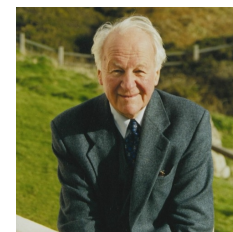
The double alienation of our ancestors

"Alienation" is a popular word in contemporary society. There are many people, especially young people in the so-called "developed" world, who are disillusioned with "the system", critical of "the technocracy" and hostile to "the establishment", who describe themselves as "alienated". ... It was Karl Marx who popularized the word, having himself taken it from the German theologian, Ludwig Feuerbach. Marx understood the plight of the proletariat in terms of economic alienation. Every worker puts into his craftsmanship a part of himself. When his employer then sells his product, he is guilty, at least in part, of alienating the worker from himself. This according to Marx was the basis of the class struggle. Nowadays the word is used more generally of the working man's alienation not only from his achievement and its due reward, but also from the exercise of power, especially in decision-making. In other words, the term has become more political than economic. "Alienation" is partly a sense of disaffection with what is, and partly a sense of powerlessness to change it. ... The Greek verb is *apallotrioō* and means to estrange, exclude or alienate. In the New Testament it occurs only in these two Ephesians verses, together with the Colossians parallel to one of them:

4:18 "alienated from the life of God" (cf. Col. 1:20,21)

2:12 "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel"

Now this double alienation, or rather its replacement by reconciliation, is the theme of Ephesians 2. [Stott 89-90]



Study 4b: Are WE BUILDING with CHRIST? (2:14-18)

2:14-16 What is the ONLY basis of our peace and unity?

In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. In Christ there is neither bond nor free. In Christ there is neither male nor female. The threefold declaration is in itself, a very revealing one when we remember that Paul was a Pharisee, and we know how the Pharisees day by day uttered the words: "Oh God I thank Thee I am not a Gentile, that I am not a slave, and that I am not a woman." [G. Campbell Morgan *Great Chapters of the Bible* 279]

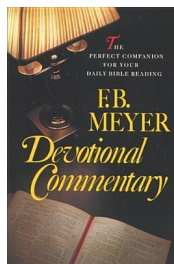
2:17-18 What do we accomplish by adding a FOURTH party to the reconciling/salvation process? (Ex. 20:1-6; Rev. 17:5 -- However, well-meaning, all Gentile worship was characterized by IDOL worship. The Gentile, *atheos* though religious, put man's creation between God and himself. What may we view as the modern equivalent?)

**"It is a *real*
and not a
mere potential
redemption"**

Access is not mere liberty of approach; it is *prosagoge*, *introduction*. Christ did not die simply to open the way of access to God, but actually to introduce us into his presence and favour. This all Scripture teaches, and this the context demands. Those for whom the death of Christ has procured peace, are declared in what follows to be **fellow-citizens** of the saints; members of the **family of God**, constituent parts of **that temple** in which God dwells by his Spirit. It is a real **not a mere potential** redemption and reconciliation which the blood of Christ effects. [Hodge 143, emphasis added]

For the supreme blessing which the new Covenant has secured is freedom of approach to Him who is to be known henceforth by His new Name, not as Jehovah the God of Israel, but as the Father. [Robinson 66]

What a noble conception is given of the Church and ultimately of the redeemed race, growing slowly through the ages and becoming God's dwelling-place! Notice the Trinity; through Jesus, the Eternal Father comes by his Spirit to dwell in the heart of man. [F.B. Meyer *Through the Bible Day by Day*]



Study 4c: WHERE DOES GOD LIVE? (2:19-22)

2:19-22 What is the ONLY "house of God" (Heb. *Bethel*) today? (Amos 3:14,15; 4:5,6)

Therefore ye are no longer strangers, but citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem; no longer foreigners, but received into the very family of God. [John Wesley *op.cit.*, 709]

In practical terms this means that the church is built on the New Testament Scriptures. They are the church's foundation documents. And just as a foundation cannot be tampered with once it has been laid and the superstructure is being built upon it, so the New Testament foundation of the church is inviolable and cannot be changed by any additions, subtractions or modifications offered by teachers who claim to be apostles or prophets today. The church stands or falls by its loyal dependence on the foundation truths which God revealed to his apostles and prophets, and which are now preserved in the New Testament Scriptures. [Stott 107]

Distinguishing the true church from the false

We are thus enabled to distinguish between a true and a false church ... No churches boast more loudly of the name than those which bear a false and empty title; as may be seen in our own times ... Nothing else, Paul tells us, was ever intended by the prophets and apostles, than to found a church on Christ. We shall find this to be true, if we begin with Moses; for "Christ is the end of the law," (Rom.x.4,) and the sum of the gospel. Let us remember, therefore, that if we wish to be reckoned among believers, we must place our reliance on no other: if we wish to make sure progress in the knowledge of the Scriptures, to him our whole attention must be directed. [Calvin 242-243]

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