

A Call to Remember

Eph. 2:11-22

Series “Ephesians”

Jarrett Stephens

Illus. Photos – The middle of this week I was traveling and in Atlanta for a two day conference on prayer. It’s called *The Strategic Renewal Conference*. And pastors and church leaders and congregants from all over the US were there to worship and listen to messages that centered on prayer. There was a lot of praying together corporately.

The entire goal of the conference is to motivate, challenge and inspire pastors and churches to create a culture of prayer within their congregations. I went because we are hosting the conference in October of 2026, and I wanted to get my eyes on it...and really excited about it coming to Champion Forest next year.

Now, usually when I am away...and I don’t like being away from home if I don’t have to be...kind of homebody. But, when I do go on trips, inevitably while I’m waiting on the plane to take off or while in the air or at the hotel to make time pass, I’ll pull up pictures or videos from my phone.

I counted. I have 43,641 pictures and/or videos on my phone. The years I cover on this phone go back to 2006...that’s A LOT of scrolling, but I love to do it. And my girls typically know when I’m scrolling because if I see a good pic or embarrassing pic of them from a distant memory, I will immediately shoot it to them in a text.

And I found myself doing that on this trip, and I’m looking at these pics and for some of them just because of the memories attached to it, I start laughing...some of them bring tears to my eyes.

On this past trip, this one right here did it for me!

Now, I know I can’t be the ONLY one out here that does this sort of thing!

Seeing these pics and watching videos – I mean, it jogs the memory, and I can go back to that day in my mind and relive the emotions of the moment – there’s just something powerful about remembering.

And that’s what the message is all about today. I’m entitling today’s sermon: **A Call to Remember**

Before we read the passage of scripture, we’re looking at in detail today, let’s REMEMBER (like what I did there!) where we’ve been...this will be a brief catch up for those that are perhaps here for the first time. A small review if you will.

Paul helped plant a church in the city of Ephesus. It was a major city in the time of the New Testament...we're talking around a quarter of a million people. It was a major trade city from which you could get anywhere in the world.

It was influential...it was uber-religious...and Paul figured this would be a great place for a church, and he spent nearly three years of his life in Ephesus teaching and preaching.

The book of Acts tells us that by the time he ended his ministry there:

Acts 19:10 – “This continued for two years (Paul’s teaching and preaching ministry), so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”

He leaves Ephesus to continue traveling and preaching the gospel, and eventually, he winds up in prison in Rome. And it’s from prison that he writes this letter to this church that he loves.

Now, this is (as far as we know) the first they have heard from Paul in seven or so years! And so, don’t you know that they were so happy to receive this letter from this pastor they respected and love.

Paul begins by calling them to worship and he lists several what he refers to as “spiritual blessings” that we have when we are “in Christ”.

This term, “in Christ” is one Paul uses over and over again in this letter to the church in Ephesus. It’s a synonym for being a Christian.

If you are a follower of Jesus...you have put your faith and trust in him – his death, his resurrection – you are “in Christ” and Paul wants his audience AND us to know how much we have as a Christian – this is all in (1:3-14).

(v. 15-22) is Paul telling these believers...those that are “in Christ” that he is praying for the Holy Spirit to enlighten them so that they can be FULLY aware of these blessings they already possess.

If you go back and listen to the message from week two, you will see that it seems there was a real fear in Paul that these blessings while they are a current reality in our life, it’s possible that we could go through our days and never really walk in the fullness of that reality!

Paul wants us to realize...be aware...and have eyes wide open to ALL we have in Christ.

And then, last week, our friend, Mark Lanier preached an incredible message from Eph. 2:1-10 and called it *The Transformational Power of God*, and he outlined Paul describing all of lives before we were “in Christ” and it was NOT a pretty picture!

We were dead in our trespasses and sins. Walking zombies! And then you have (v. 4) BUT GOD...he intervenes...he raises us up with Christ...he does what ONLY he can do – he saves us

by his grace (by the cross), and sets us on the path toward (v. 10) “good works, which he prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Now, we get to our passage today – (v. 11-22) and in many ways you could lay it over (v. 1-10) and almost see the very same outline. They model one another with some slight differences, and we’ll talk these through as we go along.

This is: **A Call to Remember**

There are 40 commands in (chapters 4-6) of Ephesians. We’re going to see in the second half of this book, command after command after command. This letter gets really practical in (chapters 4-6) – FORTY commands.

In (chapters 1-3), we read of only ONE command and it’s given twice here back to back in (v. 11-12) – it’s the word “remember”.

1. A call to remember who we were before Christ

Eph. 2:11-12 – “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.”

Now, I told you, you could almost overlay (v. 1-10) and (v. 11-22) and see the same outline. Here it is. In Eph. 2:1-3, we read that we were dead in our sins...we were separated from God.

Here in (v. 11-12), we see that before we were “in Christ” we were also separated from God’s people!

Paul wants the Gentile believers (those who are not Jews) to remember how far God has brought them and so, he attempts to jog their memory to what their status was...to how dark their situation really was BEFORE God intervened in their life.

He says, remember who you were!

And before Christ, you, Gentiles were NOT in a covenant with God. The Jews were in a covenant with God!

That’s what all this uncircumcision and circumcision language means. If you recall, God established his covenant with Abraham back in Genesis chapter 17. This covenant meant that he would be their God, and Abraham and his descendants would forever be his people.

God made circumcision the physical sign for this covenant relationship that existed between God and his people, Israel and it would from that day forward prove national and spiritual identity.

The Jews were God's people – the circumcised. Those that were not were pagans...outsiders...Gentiles...and there was a HUGE divide. It actually became an “us vs. them” mentality.

- We read of the distinction between the covenant people of God enslaved to the pagan, Pharaoh of Egypt.
- We read of the covenant people of God marching into the Promised Land to take on the pagan, Gentile nations that lived in Canaan.
- We read of the covenant people of God being taken captive by the Gentile armies of Assyria and Babylon.
- We read of the covenant people of God being under the heavy hand of Roman occupation and rule.

The chasm that existed between Jews and Gentiles during the time of the Bible was NO small chasm...the divide was MASSIVE, and this was the way it was for thousands of years.

Israel was God's chosen people – ALL others were Gentile, pagan, outsiders to the covenant of God...and as time passed on, so too did the hatred that existed between these two groups.

And just to give you a bit of insight into how bad the hatred was, listen to how commentator **William Barclay** described it:

“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 of all the nations that he had made...It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother (during labor and delivery), for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. 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. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death.”

Paul wants these Gentile believers to remember that before Jesus came, they were hopeless...that's actually ONE of the many words, he used to describe them. Look again at (v. 12).

Ephesians 2:12 – “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise (you were not a part of God's people), having no hope and without God in the world.”

NOT a pretty picture:

- separated...
- alienated...

- strangers...
- no hope...

My goodness! You can't get any more helpless than this! Like this is not just being the last seed in the March Madness Tournament, this is missing the March Madness tournament! It's more than that even. It's missing the NIT...it's actually more than that! It's not winning a game this year – this is bad!!!

And Paul says, believers in Ephesus – REMEMBER...this is WHO YOU WERE...BUT...

I told the North Klein Campus last week in preaching (v. 1-10) and specifically looking at (v. 4) that I LOVE big BUTS in the Bible! And (v. 4) is the biggest but of all!

We were dead in our trespasses and sins...we were lost...separated...by nature objects of wrath, BUT GOD!

Hey, question for you...this is what I posed for them last week. Have you had your “But God” moment? Every person here must have a “But God” moment:

- you were walking one way...
- doing your own thing...
- going your own way...

“BUT GOD” ...he intervenes and saves you! You must have a “BUT GOD” moment...it'll change everything!

What we saw last week is that it changes your position before God. In a MOMENT one goes from being an object of wrath to being a child of God.

This week, here in (v. 13-17), we see this “But God” moment. Again, you could lay the outline of (v. 11-22) over (v. 1-10).

- (v. 4-7), God changes us “in Christ” ...he raises us up “in Christ”, and we are saved – reconciled to God! This is our “but God” moment.
- Here in (v. 13-17), we read when God saves us, and we are “in Christ”, he not only raises us up, but he unifies and brings us together "in Christ" – we are reconciled to one another.

So, he calls us to remember who we were. But secondly, we see:

2. A call to remember what Christ did for us on the cross

Eph. 2:13-17 – “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 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 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,¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”

I've got to tell you...you have some weeks in the study that are labor some. I'm reading and asking the Lord to give me a word from above for you...and it just is WORK. It's a labor of love, but it's work. And God by his grace has ALWAYS been faithful to give a word.

And then there are some weeks, and I LOVE these weeks...when I'm reading and studying and praying and asking the Lord, “to give you, his people a word” – and it just comes off the page and into my heart.

I'm telling you my heart has been so FULL this week getting ready to preach these verses right here! There is SO MUCH here...just look at what Christ has done for us...and THIS is the emphasis here!

It's ALL about what Christ has done – this is where the thrust of the text and our time needs to be spent. This is where the meat is...and it is SO GOOD!

Paul writes: Remember who you were BEFORE Christ! We were dead. We were separated in our sins from God and one another. We were strangers...aliens...we didn't have a chance...we had NO HOPE.

Eph. 2:13 – “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near (passive tense meaning God is the one participating in the action – he did this!) by the blood of Christ.”

Come on!!! We were FAR AWAY...from God and one another – “BUT NOW...God took the initiative, motivated by love, and “in Christ Jesus”, we who were once FAR OFF have been brought near – How?

BY THE BLOOD of Christ. It's the blood!!! It's the shed blood of Jesus on the cross that saves us!

Illus. Hymns/Songs about the blood - This is why I love singing songs...especially the great hymns of our faith about the blood!

- What can wash away my sin? NOTHING but the blood of Jesus! What can make me whole again? NOTHING but the blood of Jesus...
- This is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains...
- Would you be free from the burden of sin? There's power in the blood, power in the blood. Would you o'er evil a victory win? There's wonderful power in the blood...

We should sing about...talk about it...celebrate it...all BECAUSE that's what brought us near – it's the blood of Jesus!

And listen to me...Jesus's blood does NOT just bring us near to him...it's what brings us near to one another. This is what Paul is writing about and emphasizing in this text.

Where there was once a divide – NOT just between people and God, but between us and other people! The remedy is the SAME for both! It's the blood of Jesus!

Ephesians 2:14-17 – “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 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, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”

Goodness gracious there is so much here. This “dividing wall of hostility” ...now, if Paul had in his mind the temple in Jerusalem, which I believe he did, this just adds another layer meaning and power.

In the Temple there was a “dividing wall” that separated the Gentiles from ever going near the “Holy of holies” where the presence of God dwelled.

Illus. Temple – In fact, let me show you this on the screen

So, the temple was elevated...you had the court of Priests, the court of women, the court of Israel, then go down steps and on both sides, you had what was referred to as the “dividing wall” – and outside the dividing wall was the “court of the Gentiles” – they were separated from God and God's people.

And...this is how big the separation was...there was an inscription the wall and these inscriptions have been found...they are in a museum in Istanbul and in Jerusalem.

Here's what it says: **“Foreigners must not enter inside the balustrade or into the forecourt around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”**

What's really interesting about this...and I believe Paul was thinking about this incident in his life. Three years earlier, he was in Jerusalem to worship. Do you remember this?

Acts 21:27-31 – “When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸ crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” ²⁹ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. ³⁰ Then all the

city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. ³¹ And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.”

Don't you know Trophimus had a testimony when he got back to Ephesus! “Church, you're not going to believe this! A riot started because people were telling rumors that Paul brought me (a Gentile) into the Temple – crazy!

Paul...I think is scrolling through his phone...remembering this moment and he writes, Christ death...his blood it brought us near to God, but it also brought us near to one another – the “dividing wall of hostility” that once separated Jew and Gentile has been broken down!

As one commentary stated, “the slain was a slayer!” – I love that!

The veil of the Temple torn from top to bottom – access TO AND peace WITH God. The dividing wall of hostility broken down – access TO AND peace WITH one another.

Four times in these four verses (v. 14-17) Paul uses the word, “Peace”. God, “in Christ” broke down these walls! He, by his death and resurrection has brought peace. And peace is:

- NOT just a truce...
- NOT just an absence of fighting...

The peace Jesus brings is an actual relationship! Peace brings with it “reconciliation” (v. 16) – first vertically and then horizontally. Notice in these verses:

- Jesus is peace (v. 14a).
- Jesus makes peace (v. 15b).
- Jesus preaches peace (v. 17).

No wonder the prophet, Isaiah referred to him in (Is. 9:6) as the Prince of Peace. I'm telling you this is what some of you need today...you need the Prince of Peace. You need him in your:

- Home – some have no peace in your marriage or with your kids...
- Businesses – you're not equally yoked up with other believers in your practice and there's no peace...
- In your own life...you've made some bad decisions, and you can't get over it...you can't forgive yourself...and you have no peace.
- Others living in sin, going your own way and doing your own thing outside the rule and reign of God and chaos is what you are causing and feeling in your life.

And you need peace – where does it come? It comes from Jesus. Paul knew if this church in Ephesus was going to make it, they needed to make sure Jesus was at the center - that's the ONLY way this Gentile Church was going to thrive in a pagan world.

What was going to attract outsiders to this community of faith? It's the same thing that will attract outsiders to our community of faith: LOVE!

And we can't LOVE until Jesus has broken down dividing walls, destroyed hostility and brought peace...that's what is so beautiful about the Church.

Jesus brings peace and the Church is where this peace should be modeled and exemplified!

He brings peace between the races! I was thinking this week about the divide between the Ukraine and Russia...Israel and Hamas...Texas and Texas A&M...they won't know true peace until they acknowledge and know "The Prince of Peace". He's the ONLY one that break down the wall of hostility!

Dear God, forgive us for any prejudice...any thoughts of haughtiness or arrogance toward someone of a different race or ethnicity. If they are "in Christ" they are family. If they are not "in Christ", you have given us the ministry of reconciliation to preach to them the peace of Christ!

Paul gives us:

1. A call to remember who we were before Christ
2. A call to remember what Christ did for us on the cross
3. **A call to remember who we are now that we have Christ**

Ephesians 2:18-22 – “For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

Amazing. Like, you think it can't get better following Jesus. But it does!

It just gets better and better and better. Jesus breaks down ALL the barriers that exists between us and him, AND the barriers that exist between us and others. You would think that there is NO WAY he could one up himself and do anymore, but he does!

Just look at this passage! We're NOT just brought in...we are given a new country...a new citizenship – (i.e., Heaven)! We're given a new family – (i.e., the Church)!

And this new citizenship...this new family...this is to be our new identity! This is how we are to think about ourselves now.

Before we classify ourselves as anything, Paul wants these believers to know that first and foremost classify yourself as a Christians – members of the body of Christ!

This is a whole new race that God creates and makes us members of. We now have a new family...the family of God. He makes one new race in the Church!

Gal. 3:26-28 – “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Paul says, REMEMBER this...don't ever forget it! It's a call to remember

- who we were before Christ...
- what Christ did for us on the cross...
- and who we are now that we have Christ...

You know why remembering is so important? Because it should move us to action...that's actually what the word in Hebrew means...it's the word “zacar” – it's not just thinking about something...it's recalling something that moves one to do something!

What should we do as we remember what Paul is calling us to? What does it prompt in our life?

1. Remembering produces thanksgiving (at least it should!)

Thanksgiving is a perspective changer...and when we remember what God has done for us “in Christ” and who we are “in Christ” – you'll start counting your blessings and naming them one by one.

Psalms 50:14a, 23a – “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving...The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me...”

2. Remembering fuels worship

That's what Eph. 1 and 2 is really all about...it's a call to worship and if you are having trouble answering the call to worship, answer the call to remember! Worship magnifies Christ in our life!

Get out your spiritual phone if you will and begin looking at pictures of who you were, what Christ did for you, who you are now, and you will worship!

Look at the doxologies of Paul...most of them occur AFTER he has been writing about all God has done in the person and work of Christ...it's AFTER this that his heart burst forth in PRAISE!

Remember the Lord...recount all that he has done, and the spark of intimacy will begin and it won't be long until your entire heart is on fire. I've said it before and I'll say it again, worship problems are memory problems.

And btw, sin is spiritual amnesia...it will cause you to forget the blessings of God and quench your worship!

3. Remembering strengthens faith

When I remember what Paul calls me to in this passage of scripture...it strengthens me...it reminds me of who I am and all that I have in Christ.

When I remember these things, I don't want to give up or throw in the towel...I don't want to live in sin and grieve the Holy Spirit of God. It motivates me to continue pressing on and walking in faith.

It's a call to remember! Let's answer the call.

Would you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.