

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
August 2019

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

What to Pray for Young Converts – Pt 2

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

We continue to consider the second half of the first Chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians – and to us. Verses 15 to the end of the Chapter. We are asking 3 questions of the passage: So far we have asked: how did Paul know that the people who received his letter were true Christians? Because they had faith in the Lord Jesus and had love for all the saints; and What did he do when he knew and heard of their conversion? He gave thanks to God, then he prayed for them.

So to the third question: What precisely did Paul pray, for these new believers?

It's one thing to say, "Let's pray for these new Christians!" It's another thing to know, what to pray. Well, what did Paul pray? (verse 17) You'll see that he addressed himself to the Great God. The same God who had saved these Christians. The same God who had given them everything 'in Christ'. ... *the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory*,... This great giving God. He prayed that this giving, God, would give yet again.

When you pray for new Christians: Pray that God who has already given them salvation and every spiritual blessing in Christ: that this God, Father of glory, will give again: *a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him*, ... In short, when Paul prayed for new Christians. He prayed that every new Christian should know certain things; that every new Christian should understand; that every new Christian should grasp; every young Christian should get hold of; every young Christian should see – certain things. And in providing the answer to this question we see what is the greatest need for young Christians!

The greatest need of the young Christian is not the Baptism of the Spirit. They already had that at conversion. The greatest need of the young Christian is not the Sealing of the Spirit. As we saw before, they had that at conversion. The greatest need of young Christians is not 'full surrender' or 'entire consecration' or even 'victory'. The greatest need of a young Christian is not, at this stage, to be useful. Or find his niche. Or be active.

The greatest need of a young Christian is that he should see certain things. And that he should see them in such a way as to understand them. Not just in his head, but in his heart as well. (Paul's Greek words make that plain.) Such that he should see things in such a way, that he not only understands them but rejoices in them, so that they become convictions! So that he lives by them.

If one is recently converted, whatever else one may seek for, one must seek for more understanding. Whatever else one seeks to get. Get understanding.

So if you're caring for (that is, caring about) young Christians, first and foremost, give them knowledge. And if you're praying for young Christians, pray that they may see certain things. Every good thing that God does through a person is done through the

mind. Paul therefore is praying, that certain things should happen in the young Christian's mind.

Note this is completely contrary to a great deal of Evangelical thinking today! "Feed the minds." Is what the Apostle Paul means. And pray that their minds will be filled with certain truths that in such a way, they will rejoice in them, and live by them. So that these truths become convictions. Well what precisely did Paul pray that they should see?

(Verse 18) He prayed that the young Christian might see where he's going: ¹⁸ *having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ...* Now there are two phrases there, but they both actually refer to the same thing,

Look at them one at a time:

- *that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you ...* You're a Christian because God called you. You heard with your ears through the 'call of the Gospel', but you also heard in your heart. Through the work of the Spirit in your heart. The message which was general (to all), became personal to you, in your heart. The message that all heard, arrested you, and brought you to Christ. 'Calling' – 'Effectual Calling'

Now in the Bible, 'hope' doesn't mean something that you fondly long for. It means: something that you're certain to have, but you don't have it yet! The moment you became a Christian you entered into a 'hope'. The hope that you enter into of course, is the hope of a death, in communion with Christ. It's the hope of Resurrection. It's the hope of Heaven. It's the hope of acquittal at the judgement. It's the hope of at last ending up where there is no tears, no pain, no sorrow, no (second) death and no curse. It's the hope – the certain hope – of arriving at last in God's home. Because you're His adopted child. That, after all, is where you're bound for!

When did you last pray, that new Christians that you know of – the new believers – should see where they're going. To see what is their hope: of God's 'calling'. We live in a pleasure-loving age, where the whole spirit of the age is that you live for the now! But Scripture doesn't think like that. The present time is a time of enjoyment. Yes, but it's a time of suffering also. So there are better things ahead. But the philosophy of existentialism¹ is found even in the pews of the Church: That the only thing that matters is the 'here and now'.

The Apostle is saying, "I'm praying for you Ephesians, that you have bigger visions than that. That you'll see where you're going. Where you're certainly going. Where your ultimate destination is. Where this 'calling' is going to lead you!" In fact nothing else can sustain Christians, like a view of heaven.²

1 existentialism: a philosophical theory or approach which emphasises the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will.

2 Recall the story-line of 'Pilgrim's Progress'. How often did those on the way to Heaven get discouraged. How often did they flag with doubt. But then they heard again of the Celestial City – once or twice they caught a glimpse of it. Immediately all their courage returned to them. They were no longer ashamed of being different from the people around them. What kept them going through 'Vanity Fair', was the hope that beyond all these Pleasures which everybody else revels in, there's something pure. Better and eternal! If you lose sight of the Celestial City, you're going to be swamped by the love of other things. Materialism is all-conquering.

So Paul prays that those Christians are not going to spend their last hours at night, dreaming about, some new technological marvel that's about to come onto the market.³ We have bigger and better things to think about than that!

Their hearts are not to be set on any earthly thing. They are going to enjoy what this world gives, because we do enjoy earthly blessings as Christians, but our heart's not on them! He's praying that they will see clearly where they're going, and that they'll never lose that perspective.

- Then he puts it another way, in verse 18: what is the hope of His 'calling' and then, *what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints*,,, Now Paul really wants them to see something of the future into which they've been called. The future which they going to share. He's already spoken earlier in the chapter, as we've seen, about an inheritance. People adopted children in the early world, simply that they might enjoy the riches. God has His inheritance. Yes found amongst the saints. And these adopted children are going to their inheritance. An inheritance that is rich; and Glorious, because it's God's. Paul wants them to see that, and he prays that's what they will see.

Friends, it's wonderful to be a Christian. We're rich now, because we are the Children of God; and all our sins are forgiven. But we're going to be even richer in the future. We're already the Sons of God, but what we shall be, that's never been fully revealed to us. What is heaven going to be like?

Well, we know what it's not going to be like, but what it will be like is always described in vivid picturesque terms. So that our expectancy never dies. He prays that new believers will quickly realise how rich they are, and how rich they are going to be. Because Paul knew that once they got a grip of that, they would never want to go back to the ways of the world.

That's not only what he prayed for. What precisely he prayed for, for these new believers, was our third question. Firstly, he prayed that they might see where they're going. But also he prayed (and this is verse 19 to the end of the chapter) that they would see what had already happened to them.

We can put verses 19 to 23 like this: God has reached down into this world, in a great act of power. How great that power is, is plain, in the words of verse 19.⁴ God has reached down into this world, in that great act of power. He reached down into the rough-hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and he snatched out of that tomb, the body of the One, of whom He had said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!" And He raised Him from the dead. So He snatched Him from the lowest place and brought him up a step. For 40 days our Lord showed himself alive by many infallible proofs. Then God exalted Him further, by taking him back again into the glory, from which he had originally come. But taking Him back as a man! "Remaining what

3 On November 2, 1981 – the Year Stuart Olyott recorded this Sermon, CB Radio was officially legalised in Britain. So he refers to this upcoming event in the above context.

4 Paul uses four different words for power in the Greek.

he was he became what he was not." (Athanasius?)⁵ ²¹ *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*

The man Christ Jesus, actually ascends the throne of Yahweh. The **man**, Christ Jesus: and all things (verse 22) are under his feet! So the one who was in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, has, by a great act of power, been carried to the highest place of all.

And Paul tells us a little bit more, while he's on the subject:⁶

There's a wonderful union between the Church and Christ. (verse 23) The Christ with which the Church has this Union is the exalted Son of God. But what's that to do with praying for new Christians?

The point is this: The very power (verse 19) that raised Christ from Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, and took him to Glory – the highest place of all. The very power that sustains the relationship between Christ and His people; which ensures that He is the One who will fill all in all; and is the centre of all worship and praise. That very power is the power which works in you as a Christian. The same power! Still verse 19: Paul prays that they might know: *what is the immeasurable greatness of His power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might* ²⁰ *that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ...*

The power that did that, **is the very same power** that has worked in the new Christian at conversion. That is what conversion is: Spiritual Resurrection, as Paul will tell us as we read further in this letter.

Conversion is spiritual Resurrection! Someone who is spiritually dead is brought to life. Blind to the truth, now sees the truth. Completely, radically, transformed and changed. Brought from spiritual death and insensibility, to spiritual life, enjoyment and appreciation. Nobody who is dead can raise himself. An outside power must do it. The very same power that raised Christ from the dead, is what converts Christians!

Appreciate, this morning, what power it takes to bring about a conversion. No wonder we can't convert anybody! It takes the same power that raised Christ from the dead, to raise people from spiritual death. And a new believer doesn't always realise what has happened to him. He sees things now, that he didn't see before, but he doesn't know why. He sees things that he saw before in a new light, but he doesn't know why. His

5 He goes back to Heaven with the name "Jesus". You can imagine our Lord Jesus, if you like, arriving at the Gates of Heaven. Here's the throne of God, and before the throne of God are all the different ranks of angels and heavenly creatures. Our Lord comes sweeping through the door. The first rank are the Principalities. (verse 21) Our Lord passes them all. The second rank are the Powers. Our Lord passes them all.

6 That this great king rules the world. But for whose benefit? (still verse 22) The benefit of believers – the Church. And those believers while they're still down here on Earth – being united to Christ – are His body. He is the head! Yet they are bound together by an inextricable link. The head to the body. And the life of the head is the very life of the body. They belong one to the other! A marvellous picture.

Paul, as you know, once he gets on to something, he can't let it go. So he tells us a bit more in verse 23. The Church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

So for two thousand years, commentators have been trying to work out what verse 23 means. Calvin says: Our Lord regards Himself, in some sense, as incomplete, until each member of His Church, has been joined to Him in Living Faith. Jesus Christ is expressed in the world. He's expressed in the world by His Church. It's His intention, that He – who fills all in all – and when at last, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, that He is Lord of all. It is His intention that He shall fill the Church.

choices have changed and his affections have changed. His desires have changed and his will has changed. All things are new. It's like he's been made all over again.

And he doesn't know why. Well, we should tell him! As Paul does in chapter 2. Tell him that he's had a spiritual Resurrection, and pray that he might grasp what has happened to him. Then he will be overwhelmed: that the very power, that raised Christ from the dead, has been stretched out again, to raise him from the dead. So he will appreciate and be overwhelmed with the wonder, of what a great thing conversion is. A great change has taken place, and how personal, God's interest is – in him.

It's a shame when you see young believers, treating conversion as a matter of very little wonder. It's a shame when you see new Christians, never asking the question, "Why me"?

It's a shame when you see young Christians, who are never filled with amazed thanks: that the Great God has worked in their lives.

Will you now pray, that all recent believers, that you know of, or may come to know of, will be brought to **see** what has happened to them, in these terms. Then, imagine the outcome, of praying like Paul prayed. All these new Christians, would be filled with a never dying expectancy of heaven. They would be filled with amazement of the great work that has been done in their lives. Once that happened, spiritual things would be on their lips, and spiritual priorities would be in their lives.

Do you want churches to be filled with Christian's like that? If so, go to prayer. The proof of whether you want Christian's like that, will be – if your prayer is modelled on that of Paul's.

[2316]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Once Dead Now Alive

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

In our study of the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, we come to chapter 2 verses 1 to 10.

In chapter 1, from previous weeks, you'll remember that the Apostle has told the Ephesian Christians, that he is praying for them ceaselessly, and he's also told them and us, exactly what he prays for young – that is new – Christians. One of the things that he prays for new Christians is that they might clearly see what has happened to them. Paul doesn't just pray that young Christians will see what's happened to them, now in chapter 2 he tells them!

Chapter 2 then is the Apostle to the Gentiles telling all of us, who are Christians, what has happened to us. It's necessary to stress right away before we go any further in the sermon, that something has happened to you, to be a Christian at all. Those who may think themselves to be Christians, simply because they've always been a Christian, have at best a poor memory.

The Apostle Paul tells every Christian, that something has happened to them; he prays they may understand it; and he explains to them in this chapter, precisely what it is, that has happened to them, to make them Christians at all. He does it twice: firstly in verses 1 to 10, he tells them that, 'once they were dead, but now they're alive!' (This will be the burden of our sermon this week and next.) Secondly, in verse 11 to the end of chapter two, he will tell them that 'once they were cut off, but now they have been brought near'.

So verses 1 to 10, comprises a passage, which tells all who are Christians what has happened to them. You will find, what you were; what you are; and what made the difference.

Verses 1 to 3 tell us: what we were.

You were dead! (verse 1) But you who were dead in trespasses and sins, have been 'made alive'(quicken KJV) (verse 5)

Think back, if your memory allows you, to your unconverted days. For some this may be a very long time ago. Back then, every day God spoke to you, through His creation. Because His everlasting power and deity, is revealed from everything that is around us. So every day God, addressed you.

In addition, every day God addressed you through your conscience – because you had a sense of right and wrong. A sense of law. You knew in your conscience that there is a 'law giver' and therefore at last there will be a reckoning. A judgement!

For most of us, God also addressed us, repeatedly – not perhaps everyday, but week after week – by his Word! Some of us were Sunday School children; in Christian youth groups; and for many years seated in Church Services. With the Gospel being explained in all sorts of different ways, by many different people. So God continually addressed us. But we still went on (verse 1) in our trespasses and sins. Though God spoke to us, one way or the other, every day, we still trespassed. That is, we actively broke His holy law!

So although God spoke to us every day and week after week, we still sinned. We still failed to come 'up to the mark', which He had set for us. We didn't care. It meant nothing to us! Because (verse one) we were dead! ⁷

In our unconverted days God spoke to us, over and over again! We didn't want to listen and we didn't. We didn't 'hear' anything. We didn't desire Him. We didn't choose Him, and we couldn't! We couldn't see the truth of the Gospel. We heard the Word of God but we didn't hear it with our 'inward' ears! It was as though there was no divine Voice at all. So instead we went on with our trespasses and our sins. The state of unconverted people is that they are dead: spiritually. They're exposed to all the external experiences, which Christians are exposed to, but it means absolutely nothing to them. It meets with Silence. It meets with total unresponsiveness. That's what you were!

You were not only dead! Look at verse 2 and verse 3. You were disobedient. You may still be able to think back to that time *in which you once walked*. Since spiritually dead, we actually lived our lives, in opposition to God. We might not like to remember this, but it is a fact! God spoke to us and it met with no response. Instead we lived in active opposition to God. We walked in a certain way.

Our lives were going in a certain direction: *We walked following the course of this world*. One of the certain things about an unconverted person, is that he does what other people do. He's one of the crowd. He walks the way other people walk. He faces the same direction. We then walked that way: according to the course of this world. God was not in our lives and we didn't want Him in our lives. We did what we chose. But we did what we chose because we were moved to do so, by a spiritual power. (at the end of verse 2) A spiritual power that is still at work today, making

⁷ Olyott shares a personal experience: "I'll never forget the day, when one of my best friends died. They came running up from the fields and they said that he had dropped dead in the field. I'd spoken to him just a couple of nights before. He'd had a meal in our house. Before I could get to the field some of the men had been down there; they had put him on a table; brought him back to his house; and he was 'laid out' on trestles in the front room.

It was amazing, to see someone who had been so active: dead. It wasn't the first time I had seen a dead body, but it was the first time someone very close to me had died. I could not believe it. I was asked if I wanted to go and see him and I did. I was alone in the room and I spoke to him. There was no reply! I couldn't believe it was him. I spoke again to him. Still no reply: he was dead. He didn't want to reply. If he had wanted to: he couldn't. He could hear nothing. He could see nothing. He could do nothing. He was dead! That's precisely the picture the Apostle uses. “

people disobedient at this very moment. ... *following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—*

That's the time (verse 3) when we were no different from anybody else. That's why of course, as Christians, we can never have a 'holier than thou' attitude. We all had that 'course' – that is, a manner of life – like that in times past. ... *all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind,...* There were no exceptions! All who are Christians, were once non-Christians. All who are Christians were once unconverted. All were no different from the people who are unconverted today. They are motivated by the devil. So were you! They do what they want to do. So did you. So did I.

All that mattered to us was our own selfish desire. We were ruled by the 'flesh'. That is: by our 'fallen' human nature. Our minds were totally set on their own selfish ambitions or our pleasure. God wasn't in: all our thoughts. What the body wanted to do. What the mind thought it would do. Was what we did, whether it pleased God or not. Pleasing God was irrelevant to us. All that mattered to us was that we pleased ourselves. While in fact, we were being moved by the evil spirit of the devil all that time.

We were selfish and Godless. We often talk of the world, the flesh and the devil. That's why. Unconverted people are part and parcel of this rebellious world. They're part of that system. They're ruled by the flesh – that is their 'fallen' human nature, which has no place for God. They're moved by the devil. That's why we join together: the world; the flesh; the devil.

There may have been vast differences in the sins that we committed. (Our society has a kind of 'league table', in which are the 'not so bad sins' and then the 'worst sins'. And perhaps what the society calls 'the worst sins', nobody here has actually fallen into. But the fact remains whatever individual sins, we were falling into, we were nevertheless the same sort of people as the rest. We can never 'look down' on the unconverted. Because we were once fallen just as they are. We can never be impatient with them, because we were just like them. We can never scorn them, or belittle them, or patronise them. Because we were like that!

The Apostle Paul reminds us then, that we were dead. And we were disobedient. That's what we once were. But now look at the end of verse 3: (you) *were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* The description, 'children of wrath' may not make much sense to us. When James and John were short tempered, Jesus called them 'sons of thunder' – their characteristic was to 'thunder'. It's a characteristic of Hebrew culture, that when someone is characterised by a certain feature, he's called a child of that or a son of that. The thing that characterised you in your unconverted days, was that you were 'children of wrath'. Not meaning that you gave place to anger necessarily, although you probably did, but that you were characterised by living every day, under the anger of God. Every night when you went to sleep, you slept under

God's anger. All through those night hours, you were under the anger of Almighty God. As you woke up in the morning, you were still alienated from God, who was furious with you, because of your sins. Every time you ate your meals; went out of the house; or into it. Drove your car or were at leisure. You did it all under the anger of God. You were damned!

"You were like that", said the Apostle, "by nature." It wasn't that one day you passed some 'magic' age of responsibility, so that only at that age you became that sort of person. You sinned because you were a sinner. You were a sinner because you were born a sinner. You were born a sinner because your parents were sinners. They were sinners because their parents were sinners. All were sinners because Adam 'fell'. We all 'fell' in Adam's sin. So by nature we were the 'children of wrath'.

'Original sin' is not a pretty theological concept. It's an awful fact of life! It's why children are unreasonable. Even babies are selfish and angry. Original sin is a fact. From our earliest moments we were the enemies of God and rebels against Him. Our conscience told us differently. Creation told us differently. And His Word told us differently. But there was no change. We were by nature 'children of wrath', even as others. We were part of that great, vast mass of perishing humanity.

"That's what you once were", says the Apostle Paul. And we should, actually tremble at the memory of it. Some Christians are converted in middle life. Having gone through all childhood, teens, twenties and thirties, with every hour, ever breath that was taken being under the anger of God. The terrifying thought that God, could have struck at any moment and sent them to hell, but for his restraining grace that He did not. All those times they heard the Gospel, and provoked Him by their neglect, unbelief and rebellion. Yet still He kept them in life, with things richly to enjoy, until at last, they have now come to faith – for reasons which we will see.

God was very kind. He's rich in mercy. He loves us and restrained His hand of judgement for so long.

Those who are unconverted should be very afraid. Perhaps they sit together with the Lord's people, but under the anger of God. That's what we once were!

Look now at verses 4 to 7 where Paul is explaining what has happened to us as Christians. It's what the whole chapter is about. He's told us what you were. In these verses he tells you what you are.

Verse 5: You are alive! ... ⁵ *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved —*

If you're a Christian you've undergone a resurrection. It's an event of such significance that the Bible calls it the 'first resurrection'. You've undergone a resurrection!⁸

The very power which reached down into the world, and snatched God's Son out of His grave, and raised Him in the power of an endless life, is the very same power that has reached down into Christians and brought about their spiritual resurrection.

The time came for you that the Word you couldn't hear – you heard. Right down there in the 'ears' of your heart. It seemed that day that the Word that you'd heard a thousand times, you were hearing for the first time! And you really were – you know! It seemed that what you'd heard a thousand times, was now meant for you: personally. And it was! You'd heard people speak of the glories of Christ. But up till then it hadn't meant anything to you. 'I once was a stranger to Grace and to God. I knew not my danger. I felt not my load. While friends spoke in rapture of Christ on His tree. Jehovah Tsidkenu, meant nothing to me', wrote Robert Murray M'Cheyne. That's the way we were. They spoke in raptures about Christ but it meant nothing to us. But then we have this resurrection: We heard the Word; we saw the glories of Christ. Then we could see it! And not only could we see it but our souls sprang to life.⁹

The first sign of resurrection is movement. You move to Christ. You embrace Him. As He is offered to you in the Gospel. So what happens to you: is you are alive. Look again at verse 5: *⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—* Here we come to the truth about 'union with Christ'! When Jesus died on the cross, He didn't just die for you. But because He came on behalf of His people, His death, what's reckoned to be your death, which is why your sins are reckoned to have been punished. You may not have realised, that when Jesus rose from the grave, that His Resurrection was reckoned to be your resurrection. That you were reckoned to have been raised at the same moment, and therefore it was only a matter of time, before you, chosen in Christ, should be spiritually resurrected. It is still only a matter of time, before you, chosen in Christ, are also physically resurrected! My Resurrection – my spiritual Resurrection – depends on my 'union with Christ'.

(We will continue next week from verse 6)

[2365]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

8 Olyott returns to his recollection of his friend's death. "I would have given a million pounds that day in the village, if I could have spoken a word, that would have raised my friend, to life. I could speak to him, but he could not hear. He could not hear because I had no power to impart life to him.

But it's different with God, as we saw last week:"

9 "If I could have spoken to my friend that day and raised him from the dead, he would have got off the table and he would have come to me. We would have gone out of the room and gone back to his wife. It would have been wonderful."

Once Dead Now Alive – Pt 2

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

Having recognised that once we were dead in our sins and aliens to God, at verse 5 we rejoice in God's grace that we have now been made spiritually alive: Verse 5: You are alive! ... ⁵ *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved —*

We continue from Verse 6: We can put it this way. He has raised us up together and made us sit together in Heavenly places, in Christ Jesus. To fully understand this we must remember where Jesus Christ really is right now. After His resurrection He presented Himself alive for 40 days, infallibly! Then, while all His disciples watched, *he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.* (Acts 1:9) And the Man Christ Jesus, who in the same person, is God Himself, is now as the Man Christ Jesus, in the place occupied by Deity – [He] *is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,* (Hebrews 8:1) That's where Christ is this morning!

But, His Ascension is reckoned to be your ascension. His Exaltation is reckoned to be your exultation. And His present sitting in heavenly places is reckoned to be your sitting in heavenly places. That's why you can pray as a Christian. Because you're not reckoned to be an outsider. You're 'in Christ'! All God reckons Christ to be He reckons you to be. You're on the inside. You have immediate access to the Throne. That's why death has lost its power and sting for Christians. We're already, spiritually, seated in heaven. So the very moment we die, our spirits go, to where they already are, as it were – to where they already belong. Without any long, long journey we go immediately to that place where we belong, by right, because of the Redemption that is by Christ Jesus.

All because of our union with Christ. We are never turned away. "I know that while in heaven He stands no power can force me to depart." ¹⁰

Now look at Verse 7: You're not only spiritually alive; you're accepted, but if we can put it this way, for the sake of memory, you are assured, that in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace and His kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus. Before very long, this earth won't be found anymore. This present Universe as we know it: they'll be no place for it. It will all be gone! They'll be a new heaven and new earth, where indwells righteousness. While the wicked: the devil of course; and all his angels, will all be in hell. But the new heaven and the new earth won't just be inhabited by God. And it won't be inhabited just by holy angels. It will be inhabited by Christian believers, because where the Lord Jesus Christ is – He has promised that we will be there also.

But we're Sinners and we're defiled in God's sight! It will never be forgotten what we once were. It will never be forgotten how sinners, came to be in the place where there is nothing but righteousness! It will never be forgotten that it's all through Christ Jesus. It will never be forgotten that it's all because of our 'Union with Christ'. Throughout endless ages, the universe will gape with wonder, that there are sinners sharing the dwelling place of God. The great attribute of God which is going to shine out, more clearly than even his Justice, throughout eternity. Even more than His Power, is the attribute of His Love and Kindness and His Mercy

The whole new heaven and the new earth, will gaze with amazement, that God is a Gracious and Loving God, who has brought sinners to His own Dwelling Place!

The whole purpose of Redemption, will then have come to pass: The purpose of redemption is the Glory of God. This Glory of God depends on Christians arriving safely in heaven! And because God is jealous for His own Glory, you can be assured that you will safely arrive there.

So we've seen what you were; and we've seen what you are, and we're now to see what made the difference: This is mainly in verses 8 to 10 – which is the remainder of this passage, but we will have to refer again, to verses 4 and 5.

In this closing section I ask you to remember 3 words:

- The first is 'God'. What made the difference? Who made the difference? God! Look at verse 4: ⁴ *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,* ⁵ *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.* There you were, in your spiritual deadness. Who was it that in-parted life? God. Not yourself! It was His work. It was a divine work which you could not do. You couldn't even choose God for yourself, because the 'will' itself is the servant of the 'nature'. And your nature was a "fallen", spiritually dead, nature. However God wasn't compelled to impart life to you. But He did! Because (verse 4) He's *rich in Mercy*, and because: he *loved us*, His *great love with which He loved us*.

We are today, what we are, because God re-made us that way – verse 10.

¹⁰ *For we are his workmanship.* You are today a new creature, because God made you a new creature. You are what you are as a result of His workmanship. It was His eternal purpose to do this: ¹⁰... *which God prepared beforehand, ...* So we don't take any credit. We know what we once were. We were dead, disobedient and damned. We know what we now are: we're alive, accepted, and assured. We know what made the difference. It was God. We take no credit to ourselves, because we were as others. The fact that we are no longer 'as others' is entirely due to God. So that, 'But God', at the beginning of verse 4, is one of the greatest 'but's' in the Bible.

No Christian would be ashamed of singing the words: "thank you Lord for saving

my soul, thank you Lord for making me whole, thank you Lord for giving to me,
Thy great Salvation so rich and free." ¹¹

- The second word you should remember in this closing section is 'Grace'. Look at the end of verse 5: *—by grace you have been saved—*. Now verse 8: ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith.*

Christians all! We were the same 'as others'. The reason for our Salvation doesn't lie in anything of ourselves. It doesn't lie in what I am. It lies in what He is. He decided to do it, and He did it! That is Grace.

Perhaps at this stage, we should understand the difference between 'Mercy' and 'Grace'. Hudson Pope was a children's evangelist. He lived in the country. One day when he was out on a visit some local boys broke his greenhouse window. Being familiar with the ways of children, he very quickly discovered who the culprits were. He got them together in a little meeting, and very quickly they admitted that they had broken the window. He could deal with them by law or by grace. He could have taken them to the police station, they would have been prosecuted and convicted. Instead he freely forgave them. But he didn't only freely forgive them: that would have been mercy. Mercy is not getting what you deserve! But he befriended those children. For some of them a lifelong friendship. They received from the man that they had wronged: many gifts of kindness, with lifelong advice and friendship: that was grace. Mercy was when you don't receive what you deserve. But Grace is when you receive what you don't deserve.

That is Grace: that's how we were saved. We were actively against God. But God has bestowed upon us, favours of: Spiritual Resurrection; acceptance into His presence; and a place in heaven. He hasn't just pardoned us and left us in a sort of neutral condition. He's raised us from the dead and taken us home. As

¹¹ Chorus of a hymn by Seth (1892-1950) and Betty (1905-1982) Sykes.

Some thank the Lord for friends and home
For mercies sure and sweet
But I would praise Him for his grace
In prayer I would repeat

Refrain:

Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul
Thank you, Lord, for making me whole
Thank you, Lord, for giving to me
Thy great salvation so rich and free

Some thank Him for the flow'rs that grow
Some for the stars that shine
My heart is filled with joy and praise
Because I know He's mine

I trust in Him from day to day
I prove His saving grace
I'll sing this song of praise to Him
Until I see His face

we saw in the first chapter He's adopted us and called us His. That is Grace. It's specifically put there in verses 5 and 8. God has actually heaped good gifts, upon those who were rebels, in his sight.

- The last word you should note: is the word 'gift'. Still starting with verse 8. ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* ¹⁰ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

What Jesus did for me on the cross, becomes mine, in experience, by faith. When we first came to Christ, we understand, that everything that was necessary for our Salvation: Christ has done! We didn't bring our works – even our good works – to God. Because none of them were good enough for Him. None of them would have created any exceptions from our guilt, in His sight. But many of us, when we come to Christ, although we realise that our works won't save us, and although we realise that we can bring nothing to God, we somehow feel that whatever else we can't contribute, at least we can contribute faith! Christ has done everything and now we must just contribute faith and then what Christ has done will become ours. So, if you like, this means that Christ has done everything – except contribute faith! That's the bit we contribute.

But that's not true. It's not true! The Apostle Paul specifically says that it's not true. Even the faith which lays hold of Christ. Even the faith by which I embrace Christ, as He is offered to me by the Gospel. Even that faith: is a gift! (Verse 8) ⁸... *you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Imagine offering a corpse a gift, and the corpse rises and grasps the gift. Then the rising of the corpse, and even the grasping of the gift, is because you've been able to impart life. Even the grasping of the gift is your gift. Salvation is not a separate parcel, which is then embraced through faith. But the actual embracing by faith is part of the Salvation. Which is what the Apostle Paul is saying here.

Which is why when we get to heaven (verse 9) we will have nothing to boast about. We will have contributed nothing to our salvation. Nothing: not even the faith.

How is it you couldn't believe during all those years, but now you do? How is it that you neglected the Lord all those years, but now you don't? What made the difference? The gift of God's Grace: Faith.

How is it that you have a changed life? (verse 10) Because Christians, if they are true Christians, do live good lives, but they don't live good lives as the popular opinion of the outside world assumes, in order to be saved. They live good lives because they are saved! Because God has imparted to them new life: He ordained before the foundation of the world that they should walk in

good works. And when they've been given this spiritual Resurrection, it is certain that they can never live in the old (worldly) way again!

Now as we close, this passage speaks to non-Christians, wherever they may be. It is clear that salvation is entirely the work of God. Entirely! So the message is clear: To be saved you must address yourself to God. A passage like this points the way so very clearly: no sinner could ever miss it. All that you don't have: God gives it! It's provided 'in Christ'. Salvation is complete but it's entirely in the hands of God. Therefore you must address yourself to God, having no other hope, whatever. You find to your delight, that when you've come to Him and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" It's because He's already given you the faith. Therefore it's obvious that you're already 'alive'. Therefore it's certain that you will be accepted and assured.¹²

And for all of us who are Christians: Salvation is entirely the work of God. We cannot take as much as one iota of credit. Think what we were, and what we now are. We were the dust of the Earth: spiteful, hateful, ungodly. And God has made us His own 'children'. Because He loved us with great love, and is rich in Mercy. A giving God. A powerful God, and a God of Grace.

How can I thank Him? I can bow down and worship Him and thank Him that He paid attention, in His mercy, to this dust of the Earth. And surely I can live the different life, that He before-ordained, that I should live. It's that different life of which He is the centre, the sum and the substance, which is the final demonstration, that I was once dead and now I am alive.

[2251]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

¹² Note how this understanding reconciles the apparent tension between the necessity of God's election of the saved with the promise: first given in Joel 2:32 and re-quoted by Paul in Romans 10:13, ¹³for *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*. It is the elect who in God's good time are made spiritually alive and will 'address themselves' (call on the Name of the Lord) to realise (confirm) their salvation.

Once We Were Separated. But Now United

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

Each Sunday morning we're studying Paul's letter to the Ephesians – and to us. Most recently we've been considering chapter two: Paul has been telling us what happened to us when we became Christians. We saw in the first 10 verses, that he told us that once we were dead! Spiritually dead! But now: we're alive! So this fortnight we come to verse 11 to the end of the chapter.

He's going to tell us that once we were separated but now we are united. While a difficult passage it does break down into two sections: (the second part itself breaking into two further parts.)

Firstly verses 11 to 12: The emphasis here is that we must never forget what we once were. Could we take time to think back to how we once were! To ponder where we might have been right now, for example, if the Lord had not saved us! If He hadn't stepped into our life, by His grace. Where might we have been this morning? Who would we have been with? What might we have been doing? If the Lord hadn't stepped in, sovereignly and graciously into our lives?

What sort of thoughts would be your thoughts today? What sort of person would you be? What sort of language would be coming out of your lips? What would your ambitions be? Where would you find your pleasure? How would you govern your family? What would your standards be at work? What would your idea of entertainment be? How would you use your leisure?

If the Lord hadn't stepped in, in the way that He did!

Look specifically at verse 11: ¹¹ *Therefore remember ...* We're told there in verse 11, what is a command. Not a suggestion! That we are to remember what we once were. And therefore what we still would be, if the grace of God had not worked and moved in our lives.

Some of us have got so used to being Christians, that we seldom sit down and ponder, what we were before we became Christians. And what we might still have been – today.

Paul, as you already know, is writing mainly to a Gentile Church, almost everyone in the Ephesian church was a non-jew. And He tells them what they once were! (verse 11) ... *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—* . As you know the Jews when they spoke about non-Jews, talked about them as gentile 'dogs'. The word 'gentile' and the word 'dog' being effectively synonymous. Both meaning the same thing. Sometimes they just said: 'gentle', but it meant 'dog'. It was a word conveying

real degradation. Spoken with a sneer on their lips, as they 'looked down' on people who were not Jews.

"You were like them", said Paul.

The Jews also put on their boys the covenant sign of circumcision. That was the sign that showed that they belonged to that 'special people'. With whom God had had unique dealings! They marked their children with the covenant sign. While referring to the gentiles as belonging to the 'uncircumcision'. So as to say, "God has nothing to do with them! They're not the people of God. Look they don't carry the Covenant Mark! They're not the people that God has any Covenant with: at all. They're beyond the pale. They're outsiders."

"You were like that", says the Apostle Paul. "Never forget what you once were!"

Verse 12: We can think back to those days at that time, when 'separated from Christ'. Now for the Jews, they all nursed in their hearts some expectancy of the Christ, but you weren't like that. No expectancy of Christ nursed in the heart. The word Christ wasn't found in the gentile vocabulary, except as a swear word. (And this applies to all of us on earth today, before we came to be 'alive' by God's grace.)

We also were separate from Christ. We had no connection with Christ. Christ was not a factor or a reality in our lives.

(Verse 12) *at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel,* Walking in this world was a nation, and is a nation, to whom God revealed Himself. To whom God has given His revealed word: He'd done it in many different ways; through many different ages. Revealing Himself. (Hebrews 1:1) But you weren't members of that nation. You weren't part of that special people. To whom God had spoken. You were outsiders.

(still verse 12) *...at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise,* As you read through the Old Testament you remember that God made repeated covenants with Israel. Those covenants were filled with promises. But we unconverted gentiles didn't know anything about that! And if we did, we said to ourselves, "Well that's nothing to do with me!" We were outside that spiritually privileged people. We weren't the people that God had given such comforting words, as He had given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Continue to look at verse 12: *...at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope ...* The Jews had hope: they expected a Messiah. The Jews had hope, because of all the covenants filled with promises. ¹³

¹³ Payne, makes a case for what we call the Covenants to be alternatively called Testaments, because they are bequeaths brought to us as heirs on the death of the testator, Christ.

There's no more eloquent way to describe how we also were, in our unconverted days, than those profoundly empty words, 'no hope'. When we thought about death in our unconverted state – no hope. We may have had some vague sorts of thoughts about there being some sort of life after death, but by and large, we looked on the grave with blank despair. We had no certainty at all that there was any existence beyond that. There was nothing in our lives to look forward to. If we ever tried to sit down and find the meaning of life; why we were here; and where it was leading to: the words that keep coming back to describe what we were like as non Christian, are the words 'no hope'. We just didn't have any hope!

And finally Paul says, in verse 12: *...and without God in the world.*

Now, of course we all knew in our conscience, as with all who are unconverted these days, that God is! Looking at the Creation around us we can be also aware that there must be a Creator God. However much you 'out argued' yourself, you still would go to bed knowing in your heart, that God is. We all knew that. And yet He was not a living, bright reality to us. Even if we knew in our conscience that God is. He wasn't the God that we knew for ourselves. We had no real knowledge of God. We lived in God's world – without God.

And not only so but some sought God in various ways: In hollow religious practice; in Cults; in philosophy. Yet we never found Him as the Father He is to us today. That's what we were like in unconverted days. We were like orphans in this world. Knowing that there was a God but not knowing that God.

That's what we once we're. We are commanded here, never to forget it! We were Outsiders; estranged; without Christ; without God. Not part of the privileged Covenant people. Without any hope; lost; damned; in despair.

We were separated in two ways then, weren't we? We were separated from God and we were separated from God's people. We were once separated in a two-fold separation. There are millions of people who are still like that in the world today. They live all around us. The description of verses 11 and 12 is a description of them today. We were once like that and they're still like that! They've woken up this morning: without hope. They do not know what life is for. They went to bed last night whatever they have done, knowing in their hearts that God is. Yet they've woken up this morning, and He's still to them the unknown God. So many of them around us have heard the Name of Christ,. Almost all of them! And yet Christ is not a factor in their life. They are outside the Covenant people. Still Outsiders. Still separated. We would still be like that, ourselves, if the grace of God hadn't worked in our lives! "We are never, ever to forget, what we once we're", says the Apostle Paul.

Look now from verse 13 to the end of the chapter: This section divides into two. We must never forget what we once were but the remainder of the passage tells us we must never forget what we now are. In verses 13 to 18, Paul tells us that we are now 'one nation'. Then from verse 19 to the end, he tells us that we are 'one building'.

These pictures, that he uses are very easy to understand and to follow, but the concepts are mind stretching.

We need to remember that the whole point of Ephesians is to teach us about spiritual blessings. This passage is very much in tune with the whole purpose of the letter. It tells us how rich we are as Christian men and women.

We will make a start on Verses 13-18 and continue with this part of the passage next week.

We must never forget what we now are. In these verses we are told that we are 'one nation'.

Verse 13: ¹³ *But now ...* Only Christians can talk like this. Only Christians can say, (verse 12) *you were at that time ...* and, then from verse 13, say, *But now ...*¹⁴
³ *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* "I've just told you", says Paul, "you were cut off – never forget what you once were – but now you're not cut off, you've been brought near. "I've just told you", says Paul, "you've been cut off in 2 ways: You were cut off from God and you were cut off from His 'people', but you are neither cut off from God nor His people'. Now you *have been brought near*, that's all over. It's all over on the simple condition of being 'in' Christ Jesus."

Jesus Christ secured the privileges that we now enjoy (verse 13) by His blood. The great change has come about because Jesus Christ died! Every Spiritual privilege, that we enjoy, comes to us because of Calvary. There is nothing that comes to us except by way of the Cross. There is nothing which is 'ours in Christ Jesus' which was not purchased for us when He bled.

Verse 14: It's not that our lord Jesus Christ made peace, He is our peace. All of us who are Christian people understand that well enough when it comes to our separation from God. We know that our sins condemned us and that the full penalty which should fall on us, fell on the substitute. We know that the righteous life which we should live, we haven't lived, but we know that He did it for us! We can see clearly when it comes to our separation from God, that He is our peace,

¹⁴ Perhaps you should consider this very personal word to you: As you sit in your place in Church this morning, can you genuinely say, "At that time I was, but now I am!" Can you say that things are different now, that something has happened to me. Because there are many people who have been brought up in Christian homes, but are unconverted. Many people who are brought up in Christian traditions, who can't speak like that. Many people have gone to Church from the earliest moments, who can't use this sort of language. They can't say, "At that time I was, but now .. (Paul is taking it for granted that as the New Testament insists: But no one is a Christian who has not had a decided conversion. Have you had a decided conversion? Can you point backwards to say that you've come out of darkness into light. "I can see that once I was like that, but now I am like this!" A great change has taken place, because that's what Paul is doing, he's describing what change has taken place in a Christian. If no change has taking place: You're not a Christian, yet.

What we saw in the first chapter: All of you who have received Jesus Christ, offered to you in the Gospel, declared to be 'in' Christ Jesus,

But what we may not have seen, is that it's also true when it comes to our separation from God's people. That reconciliation has been brought about also, by the Lord Jesus Christ! So in the area of horizontal separation, He is our peace.

Paul here, in verse 14, talks about 'the dividing wall of hostility'.

The meaning is this: As some may know, the Jerusalem Temple, in the time of Christ, had around the Temple building, with its two rooms, two outer courtyards. The closer one was the courtyard of the (Jewish) women, through which the Jewish men would pass to the first room of the Temple building. Beyond that inner courtyard separated by a waist high wall was the courtyard of the Gentiles. Proselytes – God believers. Here these Gentiles were allowed to pray, but on 'pain of death' were not permitted to cross into the next courtyard. It was the Gentiles' area which was taken over by the Jewish religious merchants, making what was supposed to be 'a place of prayer' into a 'den of thieves'. (Matthew 21:13)

So the Gentiles could come to the temple but only the edge of it. If this restriction was breached, a hostile mob of Jews would set upon the offending Gentile. This then was 'the dividing wall of hostility'.

So if a Jew and Gentile came th the Temple together – which was unlikely – one would walk past the wall and right into the temple, the other would have to stay outside. The one inside would look back at the other and be reminded of how inferior that Gentile was.

The one outside, if he truly desired God, would look longingly at the other's privileges. There was a clear separation typified by 'the dividing wall of hostility'

"Jesus Christ by His death", says the Apostle Paul. "hasn't only broken down the separation which was vertical (between God and myself), but He has broken down that wall. So that there is no place now that a Jew can go to which a Gentile may not also go.

The division of the world into Jew and Gentile has ended at the Cross." That's what the Apostle Paul is saying here. There's no welcoming distinction, which welcomes some and writes others off! Jesus Christ's Cross has destroyed that wall of separation.

[2291]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.