

Remember Your Need for Grace and the Gospel Each Day (Ephesians 2:1-12)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on May 1, 2011

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Ephesians 2:11-12 ¹¹ *Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—* ¹² *remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

Remembrance, memory is a powerful thing in human experience, whether positive or negative. Memory can motivate and mobilize. In 19th century America “Remember the Alamo!” was a battle cry and motto that led Sam Houston’s Texas Rangers in their war that made Mexico part of the US. In the 20th century, “Remember Pearl Harbor,” the unforgettable day that would live in infamy, was a big impetus for many WWII soldiers who fought for our country and heroically laid down their lives for our generation. To the veterans of our Armed Forces, we remember you and salute you, and PTL.

In the 21st century in our county, “Never forget” was emblazoned on T-shirts and bumperstickers over pictures of the World Trade Center towers. There are certain things that for those of us who’ve lived through them, we will never forget, where we were when it happened, Sept. 11, 2001, or Dec. 7, 1941. Or more positively, most of us remember significant dates in our lives like the birth of a child or an anniversary or certain moments we can remember like it was yesterday. But there are other things in our lives we don’t remember or recall or rehearse so easily or frequently in our minds, so we’re told to remember them, like the cross, like in Communion.

Eph 2:11-12 tells us *remember our need for the cross* as hopeless, lifeless, Christ-less sinners, in a lost condition...*but God* saved us. We must never forget our need for grace, then and now, where we were and still would be but for God’s grace in the gospel of Christ. We were once God’s enemies, but Christ won the victory over our hearts and won the war at the cross for all of us in the Lord’s army.

Paul’s concern in Ephesians 2 is not necessarily that we remember a specific date in our past, but that we remember our unsaved state in the past and that we remember who we now are in Christ. John Newton (slave-trader-turned-gospel-preacher) said words I hope I never forget: “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Jesus is a great Savior.”¹

After describing so great a salvation in v. 1-10, v. 11 says “*therefore remember.*” Paul as a Jew grew up reading the Torah and would have studied it thoroughly as a student of Gamaliel and in his Pharisee training. It may be he’s remembering the frequent commands to Israel to remember in Deuteronomy, which are frequently linked with the same word “therefore”:

Deuteronomy 5:15 (ESV) *You shall **remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. **Therefore** the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath***

Remember your enslaved condition and how bad it was and where you still would be but for God's redemption and deliverance. And remember what a mighty work it was. Therefore, God gives to us commands. Remember what a mighty God we serve as you obey.

Dt. 15:15 (ESV) *You shall **remember** that **you were a slave** in the land of Egypt, and **the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.** [redemption and remembrance, law and grace must go together, remember God's grace as you obey God's commands, remember what you were before God redeemed you (a slave) and remember your Redeemer's grace as you obey the Lord]*

John Newton, had actually been forced to work as a slave on a slave-trading ship at one point, before God's amazing grace saved a wretch like him. He was said to have that verse I just read on his desk: "*remember you were a slave ... and the Lord redeemed you*"

Dt. 24:18 (ESV) ... *you shall **remember** that **you were a slave** in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; **therefore** I command you to do this ...*²² *You shall **remember** that **you were a slave** in the land of Egypt; **therefore** I command you to do this.*

The "therefore" (commands) are joined with "remember" (grace). Ephesians 1:7 says you were slaves spiritually, but God redeemed us who are in Christ by the cross, so in 2:11 "*therefore remember.*" You were a slave of sin but God paid the price to buy you from the slave market. You are now His. You've been bought with a price, so you are not your own. You have a new Master who owns you and who, though you're a slave, treats you as His Son ... therefore live like a Son of the King.

A pastor named Rick Phillips says a mother he knows sends her children out the door each morning, saying, "Remember who you are, and whose you are!" That's Paul's point to God's children who have been bought by Christ's blood and adopted to his family.

Remembering our redemption, remembering we were slaves but God delivered us, remembering where we were saved from, Who we were saved by, and what we're saved to (good works in 2:10) is essential to our obedience and is to empower our obedience. I need to remember God's grace and rely on it, everyday, for everything. I do not start the life of faith by grace then complete it by my works.

Deut 8:4 "*man **lives by** every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*" [we need it everyday for life, esp. His words of grace] ...¹¹ "*Take care **lest you forget** the LORD your God **by not keeping his commandments...***¹² *lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them [i.e., all is going well and you begin to feel self-sufficient and not in need of grace] ...*¹⁴ *then your heart be lifted up, and you **forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*** ...¹⁷ *Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.'*¹⁸ *You shall **remember** the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth ...*

Even our work and works are a result of God's work in us (2:10). The gospel is the power of God for all believers, for all of life and godliness. See, we didn't just need grace to get us saved on the day of our conversion, when God breathed spiritual life into us. We need grace to get us out of bed every day and to take another breath! We need to remember apart from Christ we can do nothing.

Not only that, without His love we *are* nothing (1 Cor 13:2-3). The gospel is intended to demolish our pride (Eph 2:9b "*so that no one may boast*"). When we listen to our natural selves, we flatter ourselves, but when we listen to the gospel, self is flattened like a matchbox car under a steamroller. Remember, v. 12 says, what you were like before Christ, without Christ, and apart from Christ. You were not a good person. You were not among God's people, v. 12, you were not naturally in God's covenant or deserving any promise except wrath, and it says you were hopeless and godless in this life.

Paul wrote the command "remember" in v. 11 in the present tense, which means we need to continually perpetually remember this. In v. 1-10, the context and content is the gospel we must remember. Those who already have the gospel need to hear the gospel again, they need to regularly repeatedly frequently remember it daily.

John Stott: 'There are some things which Scripture tells us to forget (like [sins] others do to us). But there is one thing in particular which we are commanded to remember and never to forget. This is what we were before God's love reached down and found us. For only if we remember our former alienation (distasteful as some of it may be to us), shall we be able to remember the greatness of the grace which forgave and is transforming us.² That's the context of v. 1-10.

The book of Ephesians is written to Christians, "*saints in Ephesus*" (1:1), most likely a circular letter that went from there to the other churches in that part of the world, to be read publically in church. The first half of the book (Eph. 1-3) tells the gospel to Christians. The second half (4-6) is how the gospel applies to all of their lives. Paul does a similar thing in Colossians, the first half (Col. 1-2) is the gospel, and the 2nd half tells how it applies to all of life (3-4).

First half of Romans, same pattern, Rom. 1-8 tells the gospel to the Christians in Rome, 2nd half how the gospel applies to Israel and the church. In Rom. 1:15 Paul said to the Roman church "*I am eager to preach the gospel to you ...*" – Paul just called them a few verses earlier "*beloved ... saints*" (v. 8) and said "*your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world*" (v. 9) and said their faith encourages him and he wants to encourage them (v. 12). How? By preaching the gospel to these Christians (v.15). The gospel is to encourage us.

In the end of v. 11, Paul says he wants to establish or strengthen the believers in Rome by what he will impart to them? How, and by what? By preaching the gospel to these Christians (v. 15). It is the gospel that is "*the power of God for all who believe*" (v. 16). In 1 Cor. 1:18 this message of the cross has no power for unbelievers, but it says "*for us who are being saved, it is the power of God.*" The gospel is not just a *presentation on how to be saved*, it is the *power of God to those who are saved*, in 1 Cor. 1:18. In Eph. 1:19 Paul speaks of the "*surpassing greatness of [God's] power toward us who believe*" and then he speaks of gospel truths, Christ's death and resurrection, and our spiritual benefits in Eph. 2.

The gospel is for salvation (Rom 1:16), *and for strengthening of believers* (v.12). In v. 17, the gospel reveals what believers are to *live by – by faith*. The gospel reveals what to live by. The gospel is for all of life.

On the phrase “*power of God*” in v. 16, one writer points out that ‘Nothing else in all of Scripture is ever described in this way, except for the Person of Jesus Christ. Such a description indicates that the gospel is not only powerful, but that it is the ultimate entity in which God’s power resides and does its greatest work. Indeed, God’s power is seen in erupting volcanoes, in the unimaginably hot boil of our massive sun, and in the lightning speed of a recently discovered star seen streaking through the heavens at 1.5 million miles per hour. Yet in Scripture, such wonders are never labeled “*the power of God*.” How powerful, then, must the gospel be that it could merit such a title! ... if I would only embrace it ... and give it a central place in my thoughts each day!’³

For the Corinthian church the gospel was also of first importance for the Christians. What is the gospel? 1 Cor. 15:1: ¹ *Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand ...*

The verb tenses are important – they had received the gospel (past tense). They’re already “*brethren*,” but Paul says “*I make known to you* (present tense) *the gospel*.” Paul keeps making known to them the gospel, not so they’ll be saved by it, but so they’ll *stand in it*. The end of v. 11 says they *stand* in the gospel, and that’s in perfect tense, which means this began in the past, and they are continually in the state and condition of standing in the gospel as their lifestyle

³ *For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received, that **Christ died for our sins** according to the Scriptures,⁴ and that **He was buried**, and that **He was raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures,⁵ and that **He appeared** to Cephas...*

And Paul mentions others Jesus appeared to after the resurrection. Those were the historical facts and acts but the gospel preached also included an application to everyday life as well.

¹⁰ *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*

Then in v. 11 Paul says that’s what we preached and you believed. The gospel is not mere or bare assent to some events 2,000 years ago, or God’s grace in our past, but also His grace in our present. Before Paul concludes his summary of the gospel in v. 11 by saying that’s what Christians preach and Christians believe, in v. 10 part of what Christians preach and Christians believe is also that “*by the grace of God I am what I am*.” It was not an empty grace, it was an effectual grace, he says “*His grace toward me did not prove vain*.” True grace doesn’t produce laziness or license to sin, it produces labor, but even that’s not me “*but the grace of God ...*” Do we Christians need to hear that gospel every day? Absolutely! Otherwise we believe lies of self-sufficiency or self-righteousness.

In 2 Cor. 3:18, Paul says as the veil is taken away, we’re “*beholding ... the glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory*” – as we’re beholding His glory, we’re becoming like it!

A transfixed gaze on God's glory transforms us like nothing else. The more we're beholding, the more we're becoming (both are in the present tense, a continual daily process). This verse is not our future final glorification in Christlikeness, but daily transformation

2 Cor. 4:4 says God's glory in this context is the gospel of Christ. Look at the end of 4:4: "...*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*" (also end of v. 6). Outside of heaven, the Bible teaches the glory of God in its greatest measure is found in the gospel. This is where we see the glory of God in its highest revelation for our daily transformation. Paul calls it in 1 Timothy 1:11 "*the gospel of the glory of the blessed God ...*"⁴

Christians need to continually gaze at God's glory in the gospel so Christ's grace will continually amaze and continually change them. Milton Vincent, in his outstanding book, *A Gospel Primer*:

'The New Testament teaches that Christians ought to hear the gospel as much as non-Christians do ... [Paul] specifically states that he was eager to preach it to the believers as well. To the Corinthian Christians who had already believed and been saved by the gospel, Paul ... restates the historical facts of the gospel before showing them how those gospel facts apply ... This is actually Paul's approach to various other issues through ... Corinthians.

In most of Paul's letters to churches, sizeable portions of them are given over to rehearsing gospel truths ... The remainder of such books shows specifically how to bring those gospel truths to bear on life. Re-preaching the gospel and then showing how it applied to life was Paul's choice method for ministering to believers, thereby providing a divinely inspired pattern ... [He later cited 2 Cor. 4:4 and explains] the gospel reveals to me the breathtaking glory and loveliness of God, and in so doing, it lures my heart away from love of self and leaves me enthralled by Him instead. The more I behold God's glory in the gospel, the more lovely He appears to me. And the more lovely He appears to me, the more self fades into the background like a former love interest who can no longer compete for my affections.

...the gospel ... every day reminds me of God's astounding love for me and also of His infinite worthiness to be loved by me above all else. These reminders deliver a one-two punch to my innate self-absorption and leave me increasingly absorbed with Christ ... Additionally, the more I experience the life-transforming power of the gospel, the more confident I am in speaking it to others, both saved and lost. I know what the gospel can do in people's lives if they would believe the fullness of it, because I see what it is doing in me and in others ... I don't deserve to be a child of God and I don't deserve to be free of sin's guilt and power. I don't deserve the staggering privilege of intimacy with God, nor any other blessing that Christ has purchased for me with His blood ... But by the grace of God I am what I am and I have what I have, and I hereby resolve not to let any portion of God's grace prove vain in me!"⁵

Here's the outline of Ephesians:

- 1st half (chapters 1-3): the doctrines of the gospel
- 2nd half (chapters 4-6): the duties of the gospel
- Chapters 1-3 are the *indicatives* ("you are ... you have")
- Chapters 4-6 are *imperatives* (commands based on them)

The whole 1st half of Eph. is the gospel presented to Christians. Do you realize that? Have you ever noticed that? Paul spends a lot of time telling Christians about the gospel, reminding churches of the gospel: its content, its centrality for all of life.

Paul doesn't just jump into the things we consider practical: family, workplace stuff, parenting, marriage, communication issues, inter-personal conflict. He does get to those things in chapters 4-6, but in chapters 1-3 Paul is establishing the gospel as the atmosphere in which we're to live it out, the air of grace we're supposed to breathe, so that we don't inhale the smog of self-righteousness, so that we don't intake the worldly way of behavior modification without heart transformation by the gospel. The gospel is the power for our life, the foundation to stand on.

There are 40 commands in the 2nd half of the book. There is only one in the first half of the book: "*remember*" (Eph 2:11-12). If you count up the number of verses in chapters 1-3, the middle verse of the first half of the book, the very center text is 2:11-12. Up until now, Paul has been expounding the doctrines of grace. In 2:11 till the end of chapter 3, he teaches the doctrines of the church. In the last 3 chapters of the book, it's doctrines of sanctification (FOF2).

The last 3 chapters (Eph 4-6) are full of commands for believers but the first 3 chapters aren't telling believers what to do but what God has done for them, that God has done it all, Christ paid it all. Salvation is not of human works, v. 9, we can't boast in anything. We were dead, v. 1, but God made us alive (4-7), all by grace (8). God brought us to Himself (v. 13) by Christ's blood on our behalf. This doesn't mean we're not supposed to do anything, because v. 10 says there are good works for us, but Paul hastens to remind us in v. 11-12 of our need of grace so that the good works we do are done in the atmosphere of the gospel, always dependent on grace.

Eph 2:12: *remember who you were and would be without Christ*. The one thing Paul tells believers to "do" in chapters 1-3, is in 2:11-12 "*remember*" – remember *nothing you do had anything to do* with your salvation. Our works don't contribute to salvation at all, they're its consequences. End of v. 12 says "*you were hopeless and without God*" – and he says in the first part of the verse and in v. 11 "*remember*." These Gentile Christians in 1st century Ephesus needed to remember the gospel just like us 21st century Gentiles.

In the weeks ahead, we'll spend time looking at the historical Jew-Gentile animosity, the ethnic alienation and racist segregation, and how in v. 11-22 the cross of Christ brings reconciliation between the two. But for today, we just have time to lay the foundation of reconciliation the gospel brings based on our alienation *from God*, and why we need to remember this gospel and rehearse it often.

How do we preach the gospel to ourselves? That's next week ...

¹ Quoted in John Whitecross, *The Shorter Catechism Illustrated* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 37.

² John Stott, *God's New Society : The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 96.

³ Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God's Love*, p. 14-15.

⁴ Vincent, 17.

⁵ Vincent, 13, 30-31, 51-52.