

What is a Christian

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[0 : 00] Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2.

If we wanted to think of a particular text, we probably would say that verse 12 would be the main area of our thoughts this evening, where Paul reminds the people of Ephesus, remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

We must bear in mind at all times when reading these letters, but to a certain extent, these letters are private.

That is, they were addressed to particular situations by particular people. And they are concerned with the situations that had arisen, that demanded that something be done.

And Paul here is bringing to the attention of the Ephesians, the people at Ephesus, what they were once upon a time.

[1 : 34] That is, before they had come to know Christ. Or, as we might put it, before they were converted. And I want us then to spend some time this evening looking at some of the words that Paul uses to describe the condition of the unconverted.

This morning we were thinking about the blessings and the privileges of believers. They are in Christ. And we spoke about all the benefits that are encompassed in that word in.

And we particularly thought of the wonderful work of the new creation when people are made new by the grace of God. We look then this evening at another angle.

Not those who are in Christ, but those who are without or therefore out with him. Let us look then, first of all, to observe some of the the points that Paul makes.

He says, first of all, verse 12, after he mentions the fact that they were separate from Christ, that they were excluded from citizenship in Israel.

[2 : 55] Or, as we have it in the authorized version and some other versions, aliens. Now this is, remember, a quite important thing to these Gentiles, because they were living in, not just any city, but as a Roman city, part of the Roman Empire.

And such people often found that to be a part of the Roman Empire and part of a famous city in the Roman Empire was a matter of great prestige. You were privileged, you were different, and you could say, I belong to Ephesus, as opposed to any other of some of these smaller towns and cities that wouldn't have quite the name and the prestige that Ephesus had.

But here, Paul is telling the people that whatever you were, with regard to Roman citizenship, as far as God was concerned, they were excluded from the citizenship of Israel.

Israel being then God's people. We're reminded then that unbelievers, or unconverted, those who have never come to know Christ, are aliens to the things of God, basically.

Now that means quite a number of things. In the case of Israel, it means that they were not in receipt of God's promises, of God's blessings, of the privileges surrounding those things, of his protection, and so on.

[4 : 36] And those then who are outside of Christ tonight ought to reflect on this fact, that you have no rights before God. That's quite a humbling thing, because many people seem to think that they have got some rights, at least before God.

But you'll have to go a long way to try and find an answer to what your rights are. You'll have to conjure up a lot of ideas to try and work out why it is that you think you've got some rights before the almighty God.

You see, once sin came into the world, our rights were forfeited. We have no rights before him. We cannot claim anything from him. May this person has come at a time of dire need.

And I prayed to God that God would hear their prayer. And after the fact they have no right for God to expect them to answer their prayers. They have no rights.

They're stateless in God's sight. As I say, it's a humbling experience to be in this condition. The same as it must be for any person who has come to our own country and who has no rights.

[5 : 41] He doesn't have a voice. He has no representation before the authorities. And if the authorities say out, then he's got no rights.

He cannot make any protest or claims. He needs to have rights. And so as far as God's word is concerned, if we don't know Christ, then we'll have no rights, none at all, before his presence. We cannot claim one thing because our sin, our personal sin, our collective sin, our inherited sin, forfeits all rights to anything from God himself.

This also means, too, that those who are unbelievers have no right to criticize so freely as they often do God's people and the things that they do.

It might seem a perfectly normal thing, a legitimate thing, to look at the lives of Christians and say, well, look at those Christians, what they're doing. But really, whatever rights they have, no real rights to complain about because they themselves are not in a position to proclaim that right.

[6 : 51] Because each one of God's people, each individual, is under his care, his protection, his love, and if any objection to their character or to their conduct, we should address our objection to the Lord himself.

It's so easy and it's so common for people to bring down the Lord's people without realizing just what it is they're doing. For all their inconsistencies, we're not saying Christians don't have inconsistencies.

We're not saying they're not guilty of various sins at different times. And we don't condone them. But non-Christians still have no real rights to complain about them.

They are then, shall we say, stateless. They have no rights. The Pog is unfurl to say, and remind these people what they once were, foreigners to the covenants of promise.

This is maybe more to do with the idea of being strangers to the covenants of promise. They were estranged. It's not the essence of the covenant.

[8 : 02] The covenants were made in the past. The very essence of those covenants was the friendship of God. I will be their God and they shall be my people.

The friendship of God. That is surely the essence of the center and the heart of the covenant with God's dealings with people. Whatever they were, this is God's way.

And so he is promised to be their God. And people who are in this relationship, who have been brought into the covenant relationship with God, are brought into this relationship of friendship.

That's rather a wonderful thought, if you can take time to think about it, that each believer is a friend of the almighty God. Sometimes it's so great we cannot grasp it.

But that is the essence of his covenant with us. That's what we're remembering this morning about the Lord Jesus Christ. About who our friends really are. The Lord Jesus Christ has shown his love for us.

[9 : 14] He's shown his friendship. He's laid down his life for the sheep. But they're also his friends. And you're my friends if you keep my commandments. He reminds them. They are his friends.

Because if they're a friend that's sick of clothes than our brother, he reminds us in the scriptures. And so these people who are strangers are what we call friendless people.

And we know it no matter how many people live in a community or in a town. Now these communities and towns are still full of friendless people. People whose lives are empty.

empty of friendship. There's a deep desire to have friends. And they look and they search and they find that friendship is a very scarce commodity.

They find that there's no matter where they go there's no real true friends because even the very best of friends sometimes go away or we move ourselves from their company.

[10 : 16] They even let us down. We find they can't actually really understand our situation every time. And so Paul is reminding these people that there was a time when you were friendless.

When you never knew the friendship of God and what that really means to your own experience. as if that's not enough it goes on to mention the fact that they are without hope.

Hopeless. And isn't that a picture of the world if I just stop for a little while that's clamoring on what hope is there for this world if you look what message can the governments of the various nations give to their people of hope?

Not very much. Very often it's just what we call sometimes pious platitudes. Wishful thinking that things will work out all right in the end but there's no real hope for mankind that any politician can give that's based on some solid fact or some reliable truth.

But Paul is reminding the Christians that they have a genuine hope. A hope that make us not ashamed. A hope that can give them a confidence an expectancy that no matter what the outer circumstances of this world that God is at work.

[11 : 45] That God is fulfilling his purposes and God's thoughts towards each one of his people is peculiarly special and precious to him. And that even the world with all its clamor that this calamor will one day stop and that things will be brought to a conclusion and all the Lord's people will be brought together.

There's great hope real hope. Hope also that the gospel will have an effect upon people's lives our neighbours our friends even our relations not just a vain possibility but a confidence in the word itself.

hope that goes on hoping not vague but solid. There are hope then. But of course a hope that we have must be based on something solid.

And so the basis of this hope then is nothing else nothing short than the promises of God. And that's how the Christian has got a hope. An alternative to this hope is fear and despair and that is a characteristic of our world.

And many people are living so near to us we don't recognise them that they've got no hope they've got fear. And many of them live in despair. And many of them try to blind themselves to the reality of their condition and to the world situation by different ways and different things.

[13 : 19] Paul reminds them there was a time when they too were without hope. But it goes further than that. He says that we're without God. Godless.

The idea of being godless is surely the idea of having something greater than us to be with us going through life. Other nations and other religions have gods.

Each religion perhaps has its gods. But it may be in the case of these people they hadn't even got that we're not too sure but they were certainly godless they didn't know the living God and without God they were without an awful lot.

They were without a true knowledge whatever knowledge they had it wasn't a true knowledge therefore they were without holiness they were without righteousness they were without peace and all these things and they were without joy which all comes through knowing God all these things come through the knowledge of God but these people were godless whatever they did whatever they knew about God they were without these things they had no holiness and if you are without Christ tonight if you don't know him as your lord and saviour whatever you are you are without holiness and without holiness no man shall see God you are without righteousness you have nothing good at least that is commendable in God's sight now we're not talking about what other people think about your lives or what you even think about them yourselves we're not talking about human standards we're talking about divine standards and without

God as our God we've got no righteousness or nothing upright that would make us to be accepted in God as acceptable in his presence and without that we've got no peace there's no peace within our hearts therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God with none of those things and we've no joy with God or even real joy in this world without him not real joy we've got something someone has put it without God we are rudderless in the sea of life we have no control real control of our lives I think it's only worse than rudderless not only we've got no rudder we also don't know which way to head we have no lighthouse to guide us the way we should go with our lives not nothing solid with no light to guide us but we can move on to another category that Paul gives us not only here in

[16 : 11] Ephesians 2 but also Romans chapter 5 and Paul speaks there about similar situation verse Romans chapter 5 you see as verse 6 says you see at just the right time when we were still powerless powerless reminding them of the time which as he was in himself whatever he was he had no power power to lift himself from the power of sin no power to set himself free from influence and therefore ultimately the penalty of sin he was powerless helpless if you want to put it that way this was his condition and as the condition of each unbeliever or non-Christian or unconverted whichever word you want to use in that you are powerless you cannot lift yourself up from this pit that you are in you might not feel you are in a pit the reason for that is because we can make ourselves quite comfortable in the most unpleasant circumstances human beings are good at

adjusting themselves to their life's conditions and they can learn to put up with things they can actually learn to enjoy life and sometimes in extreme conditions you see that in conditions of those for instance in prison in war camps and so on how they are able not only to exist but have a remarkable existence and there are those today who are powerless who are held by the power of sin and have no strength to make themselves right before

God who don't recognise that power who don't realise that they haven't got strength that they're actually helpless and now and again maybe the light might come to their mind to realise what their condition is and they'll try to scramble up from their condition and try to be set free but they're powerless as a Paul Paul should know for if anyone could get themselves free from sin surely Paul could he was a fine man upstanding character religious pious conscientious person yet it's the same one who tells us that he was powerless without Christ he couldn't lift himself from this from the power of sin from the condition that he was in we often find that in the cases of our children sometimes they're quite strong willed and you tell them something they can't do that you're just not old enough to be able to do that but they'll try and many people spend their whole lives trying to do something which they'll never have the power to do and that is to lift themselves from their present condition their sinful state but the word of

God tells us even more even this very same chapter Romans 5 and 6 tells us without Christ and godly this speaks more than of just being godless quite often it refers to a state of rebelliousness not just we don't have God in our lives but we don't want to have in our lives that's what it amounts to not just as religious but living our lives in contradiction to God's commands and therefore deserving God's wrath that is the ultimate result of a life an ungodly life a life that is not submitted to God's commands is a life that must experience God's wrath and did Paul himself in Ephesians 2 here chapter 3 chapter 2 sorry verse 3 he speaks about the old sinful nature and he speaks about being objects or children of wrath like the rest were by nature objects or children of wrath he knew what it was to be in that position of being deserving

God's wrath and deserving God's punishment but Romans 5 and 7 also reminds us what it is to be without Christ it is to be saviourless to have no saviour and that is the surely the worst thing to be life is maybe lonely my life might be empty but to be told we've got no saviour is to be told something catastrophic to be reminded of something that is fearful because if we've no saviour then there's no hope for us at all at the end of life some people like to believe that ultimately things will work out at the end that somehow or other things will just turn out alright they usually do and they go through life with this vague expectancy but without a saviour you've no hope you've no chance of escaping from the wrath and from the penalty of your sin because your sin is personal and your sin must receive the wages of sin is death in other words you must receive your wages there's some wages you reject and there's some wages you won't be very happy with although it's not often the case but this is one we cannot refuse and it's one that will not be pleasant but it's one that will receive the wages of sin is death without a saviour then we're sinners and that means we're living and controlled by sinful motives that is the controlling factor in our lives you see anything is not of God it's of self and basically of sin as far as motivation and control in our lives is concerned if we're sinners they will be motivated and we're controlled by sinful motives but then don't we not come to verse 12 here again and reflect upon the first few words that we never spent much time looking at remember that time you were separate from Christ this surely is the really the climax of what we've taken at last because with all these different things we've been speaking about as being godless friendless helpless hopeless powerless rebellious and saviourless just through one person our whole lives can be so transformed and changed just by one person Christ and that's surely what [23 : 13] Paul is trying to tell the people he reminds them when you were separate from Christ you were in this condition and as long as you this evening don't know Christ you were in that condition now remember how it doesn't matter what we feel about our conditions because feelings are very deceptive you can speak to a person who might have cancer and they might feel in such good condition but yet when an objective diagnosis assessment is taken of that life the disease is there and we're referring not just to opinions of men but to God's word what it says about us not what the free church says but what God's word says about us and that is that we are all these things without Christ and if we are all these things without

Christ then what sort of people ought we to be and what ought we to be doing in this case Paul is merely reminding the Christians of what they once were but we this evening perhaps are going further than that we're not only reminding you perhaps of what you are as it may be the case but

also reminding you of what you could yet be through Christ remember what it means then to be with Christ according to this we can reverse the way things have been going if you are with Christ then you're no longer stateless you have a right in God's presence you can claim of him things you can claim of no one else you can ask God to bless you you can ask God to remember your family you can ask God to protect your family you can ask God for the blessings of himself upon the community you've got these rights when you come to know God you're not friendless you've got a friend that will never desert you will never fail you although we might fail him as we often do in our own friends you've got a real friend you're not hopeless you've got a real hope for life we're not just basing this on some vague expectation that maybe things will work out but you've got the confidence as we notice of the promises of God that all things work together for good to them who love the

Lord that it will work and then you've got God himself you've got him with you he's your friend he's not just the great God up there he's the God in your heart and then you've got strength which you didn't formally have strength to do his will to fulfill his commandments not perfectly but through Christ there is perfection whatever feelings we have are made up for in Christ Jesus himself you are complete in him nor are we rebellious we're quite the opposite we're brought into a state of peace with God our lives are living in harmony with the divine will incredible as that sounds that's what it amounts to when we close in with the awful gospel of

Christ when people ask Christ what is the works of the father we might do them these people are concerned about works you see a lot of people are concerned about works and his answer was that you believe in him whom he hath sent summarize everything we can do with our bodies and with our minds and with our hearts there's only one thing believe in him whom he hath sent and that is the call of God to lay down the arms of rebellion and to submit to his claim upon our lives as almighty God as creator and the giver of life and as one who deserves our worship then we notice also that if we have Christ we do have a savior we have a helmsman to lead us to guide us through life or most of all to take us through death it's a great uncertainty no matter what part of the world we live in it's never far away it's a great uncertainty and yet it's the greatest certainty there is what we're uncertain about is what is like but what we are certain about is that it will come and so this is why we need the savior in the face of the certainty of death however long it might be delayed we need strength without

Christ we not only have nothing we are nothing with him we are strong with him we are not alone how would you stand this evening in the light of what God says and what Paul says here in reference to the Ephesians people the Christians yes there were these people who were called Christians but these people had a living relationship with their God that brought them into this condition of being with God knowing them as their friend as their savior as their strength their hope as their guide do we know that do you know that this evening or is God still a distant figure a convenient symbol for religious ideas or is he someone who is so far removed from your own condition that you don't imagine that he could become so real as to become your friend well surely it's sin or something like that that's preventing us from acknowledging the truth of his own word which speaks so clearly about his friendship about the gospel call not only is an invitation it's a commandment the commandment of God is to repent that was his command and we are told that this is the only response that

[29 : 41] God expects or wants from us he didn't want us to clamour up to him with all what we have done to commend ourselves to say I've done all these things I've done all this things and that things and I've been helpful I've been kind I've been religious I've been upstanding they're no use to him might as well be thrown out because if we want to come to know him if we really want peace with him that is only through Christ through coming to acknowledge what he has done everything the Christian is if he is a Christian is what he is through Christ that's where the Christian always looks to Christ because Christ has done everything that he should have done and has not done where the Christian fails he looks and he sees Christ's perfection when he sees his sin he looks to Christ and he says there's my sin nailed to the tree he doesn't gloat over his sin he doesn't treat it lightly he treats it with that respect and fear because he recognizes the cost that was to the son of God to take his sin but he looks for reverence at the cross he looks with confidence because when he comes the day of judgment which every man shall be judged he does not depend upon what he has done individually he depends what

Christ has done and that is the only confidence he has and that's why it's not only valuable but absolutely necessary to know Christ to come to him as he exhorts us come unto me all that labor and are heavy laden and I will I will give you rest is that not what our hearts need wherever we are whatever we do we need rest and the only real rest is the rest comes through knowing Christ as Lord and Saviour may it be then we shall be brought from our darkness to the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ let us pray our gracious God as we wait upon thee we thank thee for all that is thyself our finite minds cannot comprehend all that thou art thy truth gives us enough information to make us realize that thou art a great God yet thou art a God who has condescended to look upon us in our sin and thou hast sent a Saviour a great and a gracious Saviour one whom we can never be worthy of and his invitation is to come as we are and we thank thee for such an invitation and we do not dress ourselves up we need not come with all we have done but we come with our sin with our selfishness with our pride with our prejudices and we come to one who knows what we are better than we do ourselves and we come to one who takes us as we are and who forgives us as we come to him give us that strength just to come to thee we pray if we've never come to thee before and granted we might know what it is to be brought into the Saviour's presence and may we know that peace that comes through coming to know him and that peace and that joy which is the special privilege and blessing of each one who comes to know the Saviour for we ask all these things for Jesus' sake Amen Amen