

¹¹ So, then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” which is done in the flesh by human hands. ¹² At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, ¹⁵ he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. ¹⁶ He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. ¹⁷ He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.

With God

Do prepositions really matter? When it comes to translating Greek for a first year student they just seem to be filler words that get in the way. They’re the big brother to the definite article, just another piece of grammar that could be swept away without any problem at all. Not exactly. Because those little words have big meanings and even if they do get in the way. Prepositions tell us where or when something is in relation to something else. They guide and direct telling whether you are going to or with someone through something.

Paul uses a series of prepositions to demonstrate where we are in relation to God as well as others. He also tells us when we were there. But often we’ll take for granted our location to others. We may even see others as those pesky little prepositions that we’re better off without. But Paul puts our location to one another in relation to our location with God.

We are with God in Christ and through his body we are one with him. There are lots of prepositions. Paul starts with where we were without Christ and far from him only to remind us that’s who we were. Now, we’ve been brought close united in his body. We are with God.

But we weren’t always that way. Paul reminds the Ephesians of their roots. “*At one time you were Gentiles in the flesh called, “the uncircumcised” by those “the circumcised,” which is done by hands.*” They were Gentiles in the flesh, through and through. They were not with God. They weren’t even among his people. They missed out on circumcision. The promise God had given to Israel a reminder written in their flesh and required by law on the 8th day. And yet this honor of the Jews was simply in their names and in their flesh. Paul is pointing out the differences between Jew and Gentiles. “Who are called Uncircumcision.” Those who are near and those who are far off but he doesn’t use the derogatory term for Gentiles, nor does he build up his Jewish brothers as this procedure was done with human hands. At this time they were without.

Without Christ, pagans, and that had many results as to their relationship with God. *They were excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.* When Paul says they were without God and without hope. He doesn’t mean that they were atheists. They had many gods, just not the one true God who could save and has saved. They were divided from God and from his people. That division was made worse.

A dividing wall had been built up between Jew and Gentiles. Jews hated Gentiles. Gentiles hated Jews. It was a reciprocal relationship. A Jew would say, “Gentiles were created in order to fuel the fires of hell.” And the Gentiles would respond in part. If a Jewish boy ran off with a Gentile girl a funeral was held for the child. They were foreigners and did not have the same opportunity to hear and learn about the “covenants,” pl made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were in relation to Israel, outside, outside of the temple, removed from worship and a Soreq greeted their entry into the temple, “You will be responsible for your own death if you pass beyond this plaque.”

Solomon had intended for the temple to be a place of prayer for all nations. He invited foreigners to pray at the temple. (1 Kings 8:41-43). When Herod rebuilt the temple there were clear divisions between the court of priests, the court of Israel, the Court of women. Gentiles were prohibited from entering. They were without hope. They may have had natural knowledge that there is a God and that we've sinned but they were without hope, not knowing what God had done. They were so completely and utterly removed from the institutions of God's grace that the hope is more of a far fetched dream. But God's grace reached even the Ephesians.

Jesus has brought them together and within earshot of the Jews Paul tells the Gentiles, "You too belong to the people of God." Paul also reminds the Jew, "*not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. . . . it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.* (Romans 9:6,8) In doing so he has made Jew and Gentile equal before God. Both were equally without God.

We weren't always with God either. Paul reminds us in Romans, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We had our own wall of hostility established between us and God. Romans 8:7 *The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.* At one time we too were separated from God. We were incapable of finding him. We were without him and without hope in this world. But then someone shared the Word of God with us. God found us. He came among us. He sent his church out into the world so he could be with even more people.

But the church isn't such a beautiful structure. It doesn't look so good inside. Like Jew and Gentile we may fight bitterly with one another. We may fail in our vocation to love and serve neighbor. Even worse we may build a wall of hostility between different groups. During our study on godless religion in America we've been looking at what it means to be woke. It's a study on cultural Marxism, which is only interested in dividing people, tearing apart the family, the church, and all things that unite us together. Why? Because they believe the lie that utopia can be achieved here on earth. If people are not united then they can't stand together against evil. So society would have us focus on the differences between us and not what unites. We'll focus on skin color, or political affiliation, or money that you may or may not have. These are the dividing walls that are being established around us. The Christian might fit right in, "to hell with them." Our desire should not be for the destruction of society or groups but rather the unity therein.

God's desire is for all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. And some churches will build their own unity without God's help. They'll sacrifice the truth for the sake of unity. False teachers continue to divide the church and they will be dealt with. The truth is all we have and it is not worth giving up for anyone. Peace has been made for us. Peace has to be made for us first before we can make it with others.

In Christ that peace is accomplished. Paul writes of a sacrament that replaced circumcision that all could participate in. Baptism, which is not done with human hands is as he says in Colossians 2:11-12 – "*in him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not done by hand, by the stripping off of the sinful nature, by the circumcision done by Christ when you were buried with him in baptism.*" When you were buried with Christ. In baptism you were buried with Jesus. You were made something that you were not. Formerly you were without but now you are with.

Remember what you used to be. When you remember who you were, where you were, then you can recognize all the grace that God has given you. That's why our lesson falls on the heels of Ephesians 2:8-10. God has made you something different. He has brought you near to him.

Because you Ephesians were once dead, have been made alive and have been created for new life in good works. We are now equal with each other. Because you are now with God in Christ Jesus, brought near – not by your works *but by the blood of Christ for he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility.* There are no more better thans. We're all forgiven in Christ. Jesus took away the threat of the law. He forgave our

sin. He didn't abolish it. *So that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace.* He put death to death. Bringing together those far away and those near. He sent his apostles out into the world so that all may know this saving peace.

And this peace has benefits. we are with God. We are members of his kingdom. We are no longer foreigners and aliens. We no longer live literally along side the house as an inconvenience, we are in the house. We are fellow citizens, saints, and members of God's household. And it all comes back to Jesus. In him. In his flesh. Through him. By him. For him. This grows into a holy temple for the LORD a place where he can be with us.

This isn't the work of the Ephesians. This is God's work, via God's hands, through God's son. God was and is one of us. He came among us. He came near to us and gave his life for us. He is God with us. Not God over us where we are terrified of an angry vengeful judge who smites if we step out of line. Nor is God under us as if he were to serve and slave for us and our good at all times He is God with us. The one who stands at our side. He lifts us up. He brings us together.

He delivers his word of peace in word and sacrament. Even when the World standing around us is screaming you will have no peace. We have peace with God and with one another. Holding on to grudges does no good. Forgive just as in Christ, God forgave you. Be united with one another. That doesn't mean you have to like one another, it means you must love one another. We are reconciled in Christ. And the closer we draw together in Christ, with God, the closer we'll draw to one another. Will that make live easy for you? Will we get along together? No. It's a struggle because we're difficult, selfish people, who struggle. But we're also with God and he restores us with one another.

So look back over Ephesians 2:11-22. See the prepositions for what they are, little words that tell us where we were and when we were there. See also the relationship you now have not only with God but also with one another. It's not just about you. It's about us with God in Christ.