

## THE CHRISTIAN'S CONFIDENCE

*2<sup>11</sup>Therefore, remember that previously you who are Gentiles [by birth]—the ones who are called “The Uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “The Circumcised,” [which is only a circumcision] in the flesh done by human hands—12[I say, remember] that you were at that time without Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and being without God in the world. <sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who previously were “far away” have been brought “near” by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>He is our peace, he is the one who made the two [become] one and who destroyed the dividing wall [that served as] a barrier. With his flesh he destroyed the [source of] enmity <sup>15</sup>by abolishing the law [that consisted] of commandments in [the form of] regulations. [He did so] in order that in himself he might create the two into one new man, [thereby] making peace; <sup>16</sup>and that he might reconcile the two—in one body—unto God by the cross, having put the enmity to death by it. <sup>17</sup>When he came, “he preached [the message of] peace” to you “who were far away and peace to those who were near,” <sup>18</sup>for through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. <sup>19</sup>So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and [members of] the family of God. <sup>20</sup>[You are] built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. <sup>21</sup>In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple for the Lord. <sup>22</sup>In him you also are being built together [with the saints] to become the place where God dwells by the Spirit. (Eph. 2:11-22)*

### **Introduction**

“You belong! You made the team! You’re in the band! You are a part of the family!”

How do you feel when those words are addressed to you? “You belong!” These words make you feel good, happy, peaceful, joyful, secure.

Have you ever experienced the opposite of those words? “You don’t belong!” You did not make the final cut when the coach was selecting the team; you didn’t qualify to make the band; you are not accepted by your classmates or maybe by the members of your community.

How do you feel when those words are addressed to you? “You don’t belong!” Those words make you feel rejected, depressed, isolated, alone.

“You don’t belong!” It is painful if those words describe your relationship with your classmates or fellow-workers; worse if they describe your relationship with your family; but worst of all if they describe your relationship with God.

For so long those were the words that these Gentile Ephesians had heard from the Jewish community: “You don’t belong. You are not a part of the covenant community.”

Maybe through the insensitive behavior of fellow Christians, or maybe due to an overly sensitive conscience, the devil would seek to whisper those words to your heart: “You don’t belong.”

In this passage of Scripture the Holy Spirit loudly proclaims the truth: “Christian, as a recipient of God’s saving grace, as one who has received Christ and given yourself to Him, you **do belong** to the family of God!”

### **I. Be Confident that You Belong to God, ...because of the Atoning Work of Christ (2:11-18)**

The Apostle Paul begins by reminding these Gentile Christians of their former identity. They were “*Gentiles;*” as such they were spiritually unclean and defiled. In Isaiah 52:1, the LORD promises Jerusalem, “*Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city. From now on the uncircumcised and the morally defiled will no longer enter into you.*” Here is the promise that the city of God would no longer suffer invasion by the Gentile nations—a promise that shall be finally realized in the kingdom of heaven.

Paul goes on to remind these Gentile converts that they were “*Gentiles by birth;*” literally, “Gentiles in the flesh.” In other words, their status as Gentiles was clearly evident in their bodies: they were uncircumcised. Indeed, they were called “*The Uncircumcised.*” The Jews made it painfully clear to the Gentiles that they did not belong to the covenant community of Israel, derisively labeling them as “The Uncircumcised.”

In verse 12 Paul remind these Gentile Christians of their former status, or, lack of spiritual status before God. They were “*without Christ.*” They had no interests in or claim upon the Messiah whom the LORD initially sent to Israel. Note how the Lord Jesus Himself brought this out during the time of His earthly ministry: “*These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel!’*” (Matt. 10:5-6.) Furthermore, these Gentiles were “*excluded from citizenship in Israel.*” They were not a part of the Old Testament covenant people of God; they had no membership in that spiritual community. They were “*strangers to the covenants of promise.*” They had neither a stake in nor knowledge of the covenant promise God made to His Old Testament people—the promise to be their God and to make them to be His people.

The former condition of these Gentile Christians is summed up in these awful words: “*having no hope and being without God in the world.*” They were separated from Israel physically and separated from God spiritually; in a word, they were “*far away.*”

“*But now,*” declares the apostle in verse 13, “*you have been brought ‘near.’*” Now they have been reconciled to God and brought into the covenant community “*by*

*the blood of Christ.*” The prophecy of Isaiah 53:5-6 applies to Gentile believers as much as it does to Jewish believers:

*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment was laid upon him for our peace, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Jehovah has laid upon him the iniquity of us all.* (Isa. 53:5-6)

In verse 14, this former Pharisee—now the Apostle Paul—addressing these ethnic Gentile Christians, declares, “*He [Christ, or, Messiah] is our peace.*” Christ has destroyed the barrier—“*the dividing wall [that served as] a barrier*”— defined as “*the law [that consisted] of commandments in [the form of] regulations.*” Christ, by His life of obedience and by His substitutionary atonement upon the cross of Calvary, completely fulfilled the Old Testament law: both the moral law, as well as the ceremonial law, (which especially served as a barrier, separating the Jews from the Gentiles.) He did so in order that he might bring peace between (believing) Jew and Gentile (vs. 15.) By fulfilling the ceremonial law, Christ removed it. By removing it He removed the great obstacle between believing Jews and believing Gentiles. As a result of Christ’s work, the two (believing Jews and believing Gentiles) might now be reconciled to one another in Christ.

Throughout the Old Testament era, the ceremonial law—with its demands that the Jew keep himself undefiled by any contact with Gentiles—served as a barrier between the Jew and the Gentile. In the New Testament era, with the ceremonial law being fulfilled by the work of Christ, the barrier between believing Jew and believing Gentile has been removed. Note: The ceremonial law was intended to function only during the Old Testament era prior to the coming of the Messiah. Its function was two-fold. First, it was intended to preserve Israel’s unique identity, so that they would not become assimilated into the Gentile world, and thus no longer be a people separated unto God and prepared for the coming of the Messiah to be their Savior and the Savior of the believing Gentiles. Second, it was intended to symbolically represent to Israel the fact that they were called to be holy unto God—which holiness could only be achieved by becoming united by faith to the Holy One of God Himself, Jesus the Messiah.

The ultimate purpose of Christ’s work was in order that He might reconcile them both to God, “*having put the enmity to death*” (vs. 16.) By fulfilling the law, especially the moral law, Christ satisfied God’s justice and appeased God’s moral indignation against us. The Apostle John declares, “*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*” (1 Jn. 4:10.) “*The propitiation*” is the sacrifice that both satisfies the divine justice and appeases the divine wrath. Christ accomplished this by both fulfilling the law’s requirement of obedience as well as by satisfying the law’s demand that punishment be meted out for disobedience—which punishment He suffered upon the cross of Calvary.

In verse 18 the apostle now assures the Gentile believers that through Christ we have our access to God the Father. By way of illustration, consider the fear expressed by queen Esther as she contemplated approaching the king of Persia:

*All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the golden scepter to him and spare his life. (Esth. 4:11)*

Now, in contrast to the fear Esther exhibited when she contemplated approaching the mighty Persian monarch, consider the confidence we have as Christians as we approach the King of heaven:

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess ... <sup>16</sup>Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb. 4:14,16)*

As a Christian, be confident that you belong to God, because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. There is now no barrier between you and God, thanks to the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must be careful not to re-create a separation by willfully engaging in unrepentant sin, note Isaiah 59:2, *"your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have caused him to hide his face from you, so that he refuses to hear you."* There is now no barrier between yourself and any fellow Christian. We must be careful that we do not sinfully erect any such barrier by engaging in sinful acts against our brethren, such as the behavior for which Paul rebukes the Corinthian Christians:

*I say this to make you ashamed. Is this the case, that there is not even one wise man among you who is able to judge a dispute between brothers; <sup>6</sup>but one brother must go to court against another brother—and this before unbelievers? <sup>7</sup>Actually, the fact that you have lawsuits against one another is already a defect in you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be cheated? <sup>8</sup>On the contrary, you yourselves are doing wrong and cheating, and you are doing these things to your brothers. (1 Cor. 6:5-8)*

## **II. Be Confident that You Belong to God, ...and that He has Great Plans for You (2:19-22)**

Whereas formerly the Gentiles were strangers and aliens, now in verse 19, writes the apostle, these believing Gentiles are *"fellow citizens with the saints"* (the term, *"saints,"* is used here to describe the Old Testament covenant people.)

As believers in Christ, we possess all the rights of the kingdom of God. These include the right to bring our petitions before the King of heaven: *"Do not be*

*anxious about anything. On the contrary, in everything, by prayer and petition—with thanksgiving—let your requests be made known to God”* (Phil. 4:6.) Also included is the right to expect God’s divine provisions: *“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 4:19.) Yet another right we possess is the right to claim God’s divine promise:

*Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup>By the power that enables him to bring everything into submission to himself, he will transform the body belonging to the present state of our humiliation, so that it may be conformed to his glorified body.* (Phil. 3:20-21)

Not only do we now have the status of citizenship in the kingdom of God, we have been made members of *“the family of God”* (vs. 19b.) In Christ we have all the rights and privileges of sonship, including the assurance of the Father’s love: *“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us”* (Rom. 5:5.) Also included is the assurance of the Father’s loving discipline:

*You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: My son, do not make light of the LORD’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, <sup>6</sup>because the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he scourges everyone he accepts as a son. <sup>7</sup>Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as a son; for what son is not disciplined by his father?* (Heb. 12:5-7)

Then, too, there is the assurance of sharing in the Father’s inheritance: *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory”* (Rom. 8:17.)

Not only have we been made a member of the family of God, but, according to verses 20-22, we are being made into *“a holy temple for the LORD.”* We are *“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”* The apostles were the ones through whom Christ communicated His New Testament revelation, note Paul’s testimony as an apostle as it is expressed in 2 Corinthians 12:19 and 13:3, in those verses he writes: *“we speak by Christ”* (2 Cor. 12:19) and *“Christ ... speaks by me”* (2 Cor. 13:3.) Prior to the completion of the New Testament, the New Testament prophets served the function of confirming and interpreting the apostolic writings, note 1 Corinthians 14:37, *“If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or that he is a spiritual man, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the commandment of the Lord.”* That is way they are mentioned in Ephesians 2:20 in conjunction with the apostles. The apostles and the prophets, as the channels through whom Christ communicated His word, form the foundation for our faith and life. We must appreciate and accept the Word of God as our standard for faith and life. When praying to His Father, the Lord Jesus declares, *“Your word is truth”* (Jn. 17:17.) We must be aware of the devil’s strategy; namely, to invent an alternative to replace the absolute truth of God as our

standard and authority. One of those ungodly alternatives is moral relativism: making your own personal standard of truth instead of accepting God's divine standard presented in His Word the Bible. Another ungodly alternative is the selective acceptance of God's Word: selecting what portions of Scripture we will accept as authoritative, as opposed to submitting to the whole of Scripture.

The apostle goes on to write, *"Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."* Our Christian faith and life is not only built upon Christian doctrine as it is derived from the Scriptures, it is built upon a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as He is presented to us in the Scriptures and through them reveals Himself to us. We must take note of Jesus' rebuke of the Jews recorded in John 5:39-40, *"You study the Scriptures diligently, because you think that eternal life is found in them. Now they testify about me; <sup>40</sup>but you will not come to me so that you may receive life."*

It is in Christ *"the whole building is joined together."* Each individual part of this spiritual superstructure is joined together to form one cohesive building. Consequently, we must appreciate the necessity of each fellow Christian, as Paul has occasion to remind the Corinthians: *"those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary"* (1 Cor. 12:22.) We must appreciate the value of each fellow Christian as *"a brother for whose sake Christ died"* (1 Cor. 8:11b.)

The various parts, being fitted together, are growing *"into a holy temple for the LORD."* As Christians, we are presently a spiritual temple under construction. Consequently, we need to be patient with one another: *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you"* (Col. 3:13.) We need to maintain a proper perspective with regard to our own spiritual progress. We must not wrongly assume that we have arrived at full spiritual maturity; on the contrary, we must be diligent to press on in our Christian life, as the Apostle Paul, by his own example, exhorts the Philippians, who were already a very mature Christian congregation: *"It is not that I have already obtained this or have already been made perfect; rather, I press on so that I may take hold of that for which also I have been taken hold of by Christ"* (Phil. 3:12.) Nor must we become discouraged and despairingly think that we will never arrive at spiritual maturity; we may be confident, *"he who began a good work in you will carry it out to completion until the day of Jesus Christ"* (Phil. 1:6.)

The end product of this divine construction work is stated in the following terms: *"you also are being built together [with the saints] to become the place where God dwells by the Spirit."* As Christians, let us yield ourselves to the great Master Builder, the Lord God Almighty, and not lose sight of His great design for our lives and for His church.

## **Conclusion**

Maybe through the insensitive behavior of fellow Christians—or maybe due to an overly sensitive conscience—the devil would seek to whisper those words to your heart: “You don’t belong.” In this passage of Scripture the Holy Spirit loudly proclaims the truth: “Christian, as a recipient of God’s saving grace, as one who has received Christ and given yourself to Him, you **do belong** to the family of God!”