

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 22 JUNE 2014 MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 48:4

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm 118:2

Confession of faith: Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 40:4

Law

Psalm: 40:4

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 116:8

Scripture reading: Ephesians 2

Scripture text: Ephesians 2:12

that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

(Ephesians 2:12)

The Lord sharply reminds us to put all our powers and abilities into our worship.

- The reason He supplies is that we are lacking in a certain sense.
- To start with we do not have bodily signs of the covenant we can display to show that we have been into the covenant with the Lord for a long time.
- Therefore we must so much more attend to the **circumsision of the heart**.

Come, let us consider the read passage from three points:

1. **The life prior to the death**
2. **The life in the death**
3. **The life after the death**

1. **The life prior to the death**

By the word **death** the Bible does not mean physical death.

- The Bible means **spiritual death** or **death of the faith**.
- Therefore this passage puts it very clearly that the Ephesian members of the church used to be heathens at first.
- The result thereof was that they missed the true glory.

But it was not like this from the beginning.

- By implication the Bible says in Ephesians 2:1 that these people must have been alive at some time – else they could not have died.
- Now the question arises: When did these people live before they died and landed under the violence of the death?

The answer lies in the word **covenants** of verse 12.

Note that the word **covenants** is written in the plural!

Covenants is used in the plural because it refers to the covenants the Lord entered into with mankind during the passage of history.

- The first covenant was with Adam
 - At that stage the entire mankind has not yet fallen into sin and in Adam they experienced the blessing and grace of God's proximity.
 - Thereafter came the Fall that resulted the entire mankind to fall into sin.

- Still the Lord did not reject the fallen mankind because later He again entered into covenants with Noah and later with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In essence all these covenants were only one covenant of grace that deepened every time because the fulfillment thereof also became more visible every time.

Let us for a moment consider the repeat of the covenant that the Lord entered into with Abraham.

- In the covenant with Noah the Lord already undertook to save (not to again destroy) mankind (and the entire creation).
- The first covenant the Lord entered into with Abraham was not really new – in fact it was a repeat of the promise the Lord made to Noah.

Very long after the times of Noah we read in Genesis 15 about the Lord closing a covenant with Abraham.

- The Lord confirms that He will bless the descendants of Abraham.
- Later (Genesis 22:18) the Lord sends Abraham to offer Isaac.
 - Just as Abraham wanted to kill the child the Lord stopped him to slaughter Isaac.
- Then the Lord again blessed Abraham and used these words: **And in your Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.** (Genesis 22:18)

Now we understand why the Bible speaks about **promise** in the singular form.

- Although there were many covenants, every time only one promise was involved.
- The **promise** (verse 12) is the same promise every time, namely the *granting of grace and blessing of God to those who He loves.*

This group of people in Ephesus to whom the letter was written, already received in the times of Noah a share in the promise by God that He would bless, because the Lord told Noah in Genesis 9:9:

And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you.

The similarity between the covenant with Noah and with Abraham is thus that the Lord would bless the descendants of both – and out of both nations were born.

- *According to this promise of God to Noah and Abraham that He would bless the peoples in this covenant of grace the elect from the heathens obtained a share of the redemption-grace attained by the Lord Jesus. This is what is revealed in Ephesians 2.*

The matter we must keep in mind is that the Ephesians were addressed on behalf of us also. It is thus our case the Lord has here on the table.

2. The life in the death.

In no way mankind could escape the taint of sin we obtained in Abraham.

- The more so the heathens who were outside of the descendants and covenant in Abraham.
- In Ephesians 2:12 the Lord depicts the great miseries the people were subjected to. During these times they were devoid of Christ.

This means that they were outside the grace of Christ.

- There are more matters they were excluded from, but they must note that this was the most important one.
- If you do not share in Jesus Christ's atonement, than you lose all other possessions of glory, like possessing citizenship of the church in the Hereafter.
- At the same time you are an alien regarding God's covenant of grace – you have no hope for the hereafter and also not even for this earthly life.

But the opposite is also true: Should your heart and life be bound to the Lord Jesus Christ, then the other goods of grace fall into place by itself.

To properly understand the miseries of the death without Christ we must consider the meaning of all the things written there.

- **Citizenship** of Israel, as used in chapter 2:12 does not mean real membership of a nation.
- It is a spiritual citizenship or civil right – it refers to the state of eternal glory that comes due to the earnings of Christ, namely the kingdom of God.

Alienated from citizenship of Israel means literally that we became estranged through our sins from citizenship in heaven,

- Such a person lost in sin is thus not part of the people of the hereafter.

Alien (verse 12) means somebody without any rights.

- An alien had no right to possessions or any protection.
- This lack of rights is now relevant in the passage about the covenant.

Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise means that such a person became totally devoid of any rights in God's covenants of grace.

- He has thus no community or part to Jesus Christ.
- By this the apostle refers to the state of perfection that existed in the paradise (compare 4:18; 1:10), but is now destroyed by the sin.

In fact the heathens were never part of the Children of Israel – because Israel as a nation only came to being after the Lord called Abraham, and from his descendants, especially from Jacob, this nation first came to being.

- Therefore they also never had part in God's specific covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- But in Adam they did indeed, once upon a time, live in the blessed communion with God.
- By this way (even although the time separation is far) they did experience the grace of God's presence.

Therewith they also experienced something about the glory of God's covenant of grace through which they, by the earnings of Jesus, were inaugurated into the grace of God.

Those who are without Christ are not inaugurated into this grace and glory. They have **no hope**. (Verse 12)

- **Having no hope** means that such persons miss expectations in heaven – only the hell remains.
- The heathens thus live in uncertainty and fear regarding the hereafter.

Because unbelievers are without God they also are without the saving grace.

- They thus have no share into the Christ's atonement.

Now the Bible describes the most terrifying matter you could possibly imagine: It does not only deal with your expectations after death.

- It also deals with your life on the other side of the grave – also in this world such a person is without God.
- The word **world** depicts the desolation and miseries on the other side of the grave.
- Their hope thus dies *in time and eternity*.

3. The life after the death

From the previous part of this sermon it is very clear that the church members of Ephesus – like all people – previously were in the greatest miseries due to the sin. Sin means to be totally forsaken. (2:1-3)

- Since they came to conversion matters notably changed. In Jesus Christ they have full community with God. (2:4 onwards)
- They thus share fully in all the grace of the Lord.

To be taken up into the communion of grace with God and to become part of His covenant of redemption is not bookwork.

- You must do something with it – you have a specific task to fulfill.
- Therefore the Ephesians (we) are reminded to remember what lies behind them.
- They must remember that they now have the Lord Jesus Christ as the contents of their lives, but it was not always like that.

The Lord wants that there must be something permanent remaining in the Ephesians: They must continually remember – consider it without stopping – that they were in desolation of sin.

- They were part of the multitude of people who were in the flesh.
- This means that they had no part in the grace of God.
- Therefore they had nothing in the flesh nor in the spirit to show – their bodies missed the sign of the covenant of grace.

The memory of all these matters must compel them to fully perform in their faith and worship.

The fact of Paul indicating that the circumcision is done by hand is just to say that the physical circumcision is also not the real thing – it was just a physical token that ended.

- In fact it deals with the circumcision of the heart.

According to Romans 2:25 – 26 the physical circumcision lands you deep into trouble should you sin because your circumcision is then regarded as uncircumcision.

- There is thus not necessarily a link between physical and spiritual circumcision.
- The circumcision done by hand is only physical and does not remove the internal evil.
- The Lord thus makes it very clear that by the physically circumcised there is not necessarily circumcision of the heart present.

These matters are also not first written about in the New Testament.

- In the Old Testament the Lord already wrote that the people must have themselves circumcised to their hearts, and bow to the Lord.
- The internal decay is still with each person. (Compare Deuteronomy 10:16 and Ezekiel 36:26).

Application

The name of our congregation instead of the name of the Ephesians might as well have been written into this passage.

- Keep in mind that we are inaugurated by God's special grace into the earnings of Jesus Christ.
- We are inaugurated from the outside into our citizenship of the heaven.
- God is with us on earth and in heaven.

But then our lives must continually exhibit that God the Holy Spirit is working in us.

- It is a very unacceptable condition should we bear the name Christian, but we do not know the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Should you look at verse 12 then we could say that such a person is listed at the bottom of the list:

- He/she is in this world without God.
- Such a person faces a future devoid of blessing and expectations.

Perhaps the miseries taking place in our world is just an indication that the Lord has withdrawn His hand of grace over us because most of the people exclude God from their lives.

We must live so that it is clear every moment that you are arranging your earthly life in such a way that it will go over into the eternal kingdom of God.

- The covenant of grace is not only the one side that teaches that the Lord will bless us and be a God for us.
- He also has another side that says that we can be the children of God.

Brothers and sisters, you must be scared of all the miseries contained by the heathendom.

- It only renders death.
- Let us honestly say to each other that half a faith and a wrong faith are both also heathen.
- God only reckons a true faith.

The people of the previous times gradually gave way and slowly wandered away from God until they became the heathendom that is caught up in the dark hands of death.

- Take care that we do not follow that road.
- In this chapter the Lord reveals that we are lacking and this demands from us the best and sharpest performance in faith.

Come, let us reach towards it.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 118:13

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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