

Notes: *Once Far Off, Now Brought Near* (Ephesians 2:11-13)

Intro: Twice we are admonished to “remember” how far from God we once were and how near to God we now are. Take these truths to heart lest God seem distant when he is really near “in Christ”.

#1: Remember how far from God you once were. Frequently we should meditate on the sin and misery of our former condition. “Therefore” signals a new section and viewpoint. Verses 1-10 described our lost condition from the viewpoint of personal depravity: dead, slaves, condemned. Here our lost condition is described from the viewpoint of salvation history. Throughout OT history, the Gentiles were cut off from the saving grace which God revealed almost exclusively to the Jews. True God had not left himself without witness having revealed his attributes and nature to the nations in creation, history, and man’s nature and heart (Ps. 19:1ff; Acts 14:17; 17:28; Rom. 2:14-15). But his saving grace was the exclusive passion of the Jew. God called Abraham from his idolatry into covenant with himself and led him to Canaan (Josh 24:2-3). God supernaturally enabled Abraham and Sarah (barren and beyond childbearing years) to conceive and bear a son, Isaac at ninety. Through that seed, as promised, God wonderfully created a nation for himself to bear testimony to a true knowledge of God (Gen. 12:1ff). God gave the men the physical sign of “circumcision” to mark the nation as being separated from the unbelieving world and consecrated to the Lord’s service. True the Jews abused the sign. Accepting it as a mark of their supposed superiority when they were stiff-necked and ignoring the spiritual truth it signified—the necessity of a circumcised heart by faith in God’s mercy as exemplified by the sacrifices and modeled by Father Abraham (Rom 4:11; 2:29; cf. Deut. 10:16). But circumcision, as God intended it, was the nation’s certificate of adoption by God (Gen. 17:7-10), its wedding band of marriage to God, a reminder of the cutting off of the sinful flesh by the shedding of blood and faith in God’s mercy. God had not given this badge to the Gentiles. They were cut off from God (Rom. 9:4-5). This is a picture of modern people who live cut off from God (Eph. 4:17-19). Let us remember with fear what we once were through our disobedience that we may remember with praise what we now are only by God’s grace: Cut off from God’s Messiah. “separated from Christ” The entire religion of OT Israel pointed to Christ, the “seed” of the woman and “offspring” of Abraham (Gen 3:15; Gal 3:16). Christ was the hope of Israel (Rom 9:5). The Gentiles had no place for a Savior. Neither does modern society which views humanity as the product of chance living without purpose on a speck lost in the vastness of time and space. We are the healthiest and wealthiest people in history but often the most empty and despairing. God’s Messiah can fill such people with purpose. Cut off from God’s community. Greece attained wisdom and Rome power but however great they were, they were outside the circle of God’s care—his people. Much has changed for the community of God since Christ’s appearance. We no longer need to be a member of a particular race or nation. We need no longer wear the badge of circumcision or practice the ceremonies of the Law of Moses (2:15). Still you cannot be saved without the people of God becoming your people. God saves us individually but not in isolation. He joins us to Christ as members of his body and adopts us as members of his household. How can we be joined in fellowship to Christ and our Father if we are unwilling to love our brothers and sisters loved by the Father and redeemed by Christ? Cut off from this community we are outside the circle of God’s unique concern! Membership in the people of God is one of our basic identities. That identity overrides the barriers of race, gender, age, and social class which otherwise divide

our world. Cut off from God's purpose in history. God's covenant, like that of marriage, is his relational bond accompanied by promises and responsibilities. The details of God's salvation became progressively clearer through a series of covenants he made with particular individuals (Abraham, Moses, David). What was their purpose? That "promised" to Abraham—to bring the true knowledge of himself to the nations through his "offspring" (Christ/Gal 3:16; Gen 12:1-3). This purpose of history was unknown to the Gentiles during the OT. It remains unknown to many today. Thus history/life is meaningless.

#2: Remember how near to God you now are. "but now" (13) signals the pivot point of history! Christ came as Israel's Messiah and a "light to the Gentiles" (Lk 2:32). Christ came speaking peace to those far and near (Isa 57:19). Through Christ, believing Jew and Gentile are no longer two but one new man brought near to God! This reconciliation was achieved "in Christ" and "by the blood of Christ." Keep these two together! Don't emphasize one at the expense of the other! Reconciled "by Christ's blood". Christ has paid our debts and those debts have ceased. By his blood we are washed from the filth of Adam and clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Reconciled "in Christ" Israel had the shadow but we the reality. The privileges Israel had we have and more. Christ is the perfect sacrifice and better Priest. Christ is near to God and we are near "in him". How should we then live?