

Series: Ephesians: *The Christian Mystery and Mission*

Week 8

CDOBC – beginning on 2/6/11

Title: “The Unity of the Church”

Ephesians 2:11-22 ~ March 27, 2011

OBJECTIVE: To help believers understand the unity that the grace of God brings to all the elect.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- New Directory inserts completed
- VBS Sign-ups begin today!
- Youth p.m. service next Sunday – April 3rd 6 p.m.
- Baptism May 22nd
- Baby / Child Dedication May 8th – Mother’s Day
- Become a member of CDOBC – New Members welcomed on April 10th

Opening prayer

We have many walls in our world. Walls that divide nations and people. The Berlin Wall divided Berlin for decades...The Great Wall of China. Some say we shouldn’t have any walls that limit where people can travel. All of us would agree that prison walls serve a much needed purpose to protect society.

But sometimes we build walls between us that aren’t physical walls, but walls of disagreement and walls of hatred. Sometimes we put walls of division between different cultures, races, ages, backgrounds, among other things.

In the church, many have put up walls of division based on worship, and other preferences we might have.

In our passage today, Paul will help us realize that Christians shouldn’t be in the business of building walls of division, but instead, we should treasure the unity we have in Christ. However, he first begins by reminding the Gentile believers in Ephesus that:

Before Christ, you were excluded from Him.*vs. 11-12*

“Therefore” connects these verses with the preceding verses. Paul has explained our salvation from God’s perspective in chapter 1. He chose us, predestined us, and adopted us. In chapter 2, he explained how we were spiritually dead, but God has made us alive in Christ Jesus through His grace, and our salvation has a purpose not just for eternity, but for our life right now!

“Therefore” – remember where you come from. In light of your salvation – remember what you were saved from! If you don’t remember where you were before you were saved, you will take your salvation for granted. You will think you were entitled to it! In vs. 1-3 of chapter 2, Paul talked of how every human being is spiritually dead before Christ. Now, Paul is addressing the Gentiles in the Ephesian church. He first highlights the great ethnic division that plagued humanity from the time of Abraham through the time of his writing this letter in the first century – and still plagues many in our world today. I’m speaking of the great divide and hatred between Jew and Gentile. The Jews looked down upon the Gentiles with great prejudice. The Jews believed that God created Gentiles to fuel the fires of hell. It was unlawful for a Jewish woman to help a Gentile woman in childbirth because it would be helping to bring another Gentile into this world. If a Jew married a Gentile, the Jewish family would hold a funeral, indicating that in their eyes, their son/daughter was now dead – excluded from their family and from the nation. We even see that the Apostle Peter – in Acts 10 – was still dealing with this prejudice as he entered and shared Christ with the Gentile, Cornelius. This prejudice went both ways. The Romans & Greeks saw themselves as the superior race of people, and they viewed all others as barbarians.

Paul says the Gentiles were referred to as “the uncircumcised”. This was a negative term – a demeaning term in the mind of the Jew.

Circumcision was the outward sign of God's special relationship with Israel. For the Jew, this became an issue of pride instead of the intended purpose which was a call to holy living. God chose the nation of Israel not because they were better than anyone else but out of His grace, He chose them to be a channel to show and share God's love and truth to the nations. What God intended to be a privilege and mission turned into a source of pride. Paul corrects this false, prideful thinking by the simple parenthesis noting that circumcision is simply done in the body – in the flesh. Circumcision was one of the things that caused a great separation between Jew and Gentile, but Paul continues...

He tells them to remember four things about their previous way of life.

First, he says that at that time (before they came to Christ) they were separate from Messiah. This is not a reference here to Jesus, but to the idea and anticipation of Messiah. "Christ" means "anointed one" – and the Messiah was a great source of optimism for the Jew. The Jew knew that no matter how bad their current situation was that God was going to send the Messiah – a deliverer. The Gentile didn't have a promised Messiah...they had no promised deliverer.

Second, they were "foreigners" to God's covenants. Why was this a negative thing for the Gentile? Well, the Jewish people had a spiritual advantage that the Gentile's didn't have. They had the covenants of God (Abrahamic primarily, but also Palestinian, Davidic, New Covenant) which pointed to the promise of Messiah. Most Jews understood that God had a purpose to the world, and that there was something beyond this earthly life. However, for the Gentile, they believed that death was the end of all existence, and the stoic philosophers taught that the earth had cycles that lasted 3,000 years, and at the end of each 3,000 year cycle, the earth would burn up, and the next cycle would start all over again (see [The Letters to the Galatians and](#)

Ephesians, The New Daily Study Bible, by William Barclay, p. 124). This was a great spiritual disadvantage for the Gentile, for the Jew had a stronger basis for understanding the truth of Christ.

Third, they were “without hope”. This was understandable given their lack of belief in eternal life, and their fatalistic view of history as taught by the leading philosophers of the day. What do you live for if there is no purpose for your life? What do you do when you don’t have a sense of God nor His commands for how we should live in this life?

Fourth, they were “without God”. What a devastating statement. They were actually very religious people. They were polytheistic – meaning that they worshiped many gods – but they didn’t know the One, True God, as the Jewish people did.

These four things describe where the Gentiles came from - spiritually. This was their great spiritual disadvantage compared to the Jewish believers. This doesn’t mean that the Jews were better in any way; it simply highlights the longer road that the Gentiles had to travel in order to understand the things of Christ.

Application: Do you appreciate your spiritual heritage? If you were raised in a Christian home, do you thank God for that blessing – even though your parents weren’t perfect they exposed you to the light of Christ!

Do you appreciate God’s work in your life? Some of you here today weren’t blessed to grow up in a Christian home, but that never stops God. He chose you – He called you – He predestined you – He adopted you – He has blessed you – He had given you His grace – He has a plan for you. Do you remember where you have come from?

Application:

Christ has reconciled all believers.*vs. 13-18*

Another great verse (vs. 13 - like 2:4 “But...God”) that serves as a hinge from the grave reality of where we were before Christ, to where Christ has brought us. Notice it is Christ who has brought us near through His shed blood. For the Gentile believer, they were once “far away” from God – but through Christ’s work on the cross and God’s election of them unto salvation, He has brought them near to Him.

I summarized these verses using the word “reconciled”. In order to be reconciled, you must have some sort of hostility or disagreement with the other party. In this case, Paul is referring to the great barrier and division between the Jew and the Greek.

Most importantly, Paul says that Jesus (“He Himself”) is our peace. Here’s the key...whatever divided Jewish and Gentile believers in the first century, they can have peace in Jesus...and whatever may divide modern-day believers, we can also have peace in Jesus!

When we read the word “peace”, it’s important to realize that Paul is not speaking here of simply stopping a fight – of agreeing not to argue any longer. He’s saying that in Christ, we have true peace.

This Greek term means “*to join, tie together into a whole*”. In other words, the two who were at odds with each other are now one – joined together!

The “barrier” and “dividing wall of hostility” referred to here is a reference to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple built by Herod the Great was the one that existed in the time of Christ, in the first century. The layout of the Temple was thus:

Holy of Holies was the inner-most court – restricted to everyone but the High Priest 1x / year.

The Court of Priests– were only the priests could enter and do their work

The Court of the Israelites–accessible to any male Jew

The Court of the Women– accessible to any Jew and was as far as women were able to enter the Temple structure

All of these courts were divided and separated by short walls, but they were all on the same level.

“At the perimeter of the Court of the Women, one would descend five steps to a level area in which there was erected a five-foot stone barricade that went around the temple enclosure; then, after another level space, there were fourteen more steps that descended to the Court of the Gentiles. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the wall dividing Jews from Gentiles was marked at intervals by stone inscriptions stating that no foreigner (Gentile) was permitted to enter the Jewish enclosures upon penalty of death.” (Ephesians, An Expositional Commentary, by James Montgomery Boice, p. 83).

In 1871 and 1935, archeologists discovered two of these stone tablets that used to warn the Gentiles not to enter the Temple area. One of these tablets sits today in a museum in Istanbul, Turkey.

Imagine if you were a Gentile convert to Christianity in the early years of the Church, and the Jewish believers were meeting in the Temple area – and you could not join them! Paul says that this division which used to separate the Jewish people from all others – was no longer valid. What used to separate them, Christ has “destroyed” through His death and resurrection. The most vivid picture of this is what happened when Jesus died on the cross, Matthew records how at that moment, the temple veil, which separated the Holy of Holies in the Temple from all the other courts, was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51).

Vs. 15 - “...by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.” What does this mean?

The Law – the Mosaic Law – contained 613 commandments in its original form, and the Jewish people added to that number. They believed that in order to have fellowship with God, one must obey all of those commands. This was a burden that nobody could bear. But Christ is the end of the law (Romans 10:4 “Christ is the end of the

law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”). This means that Jesus’ death / His sacrifice / His blood is the permanent fix to our alienation from God. He paid the price for our sins and defeated death through His resurrection, and through our faith in Jesus we are united eternally to God, no longer dependent on any ritual or commands. In fact, Jesus stated that all the commands of the Law are summed up in two commands – To “...Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’**38**This is the first and greatest commandment.**39**And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’**40**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt. 22:37-40)

Vs. 15b -“His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace...”

One quick, but very important note on this term, “new”. There are two words for new in Greek. *Neos* means new in regards to time – a new chair that was made – but it’s just like the other chairs made just like it – but this one is *neos* – new. Paul doesn’t use that Greek word, but he uses the other Greek word for new – *kainos*. This term means new in regards to quality. It points to something new – something that didn’t exist before (see The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, The New Daily Study Bible, by William Barclay, p. 133-134). This means that the “new person in Christ is not simply a Jew or Gentile who now happens to be a Christian. He is no longer a Jew or Gentile but only a Christian.” (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians, by John MacArthur, p.

78).

Romans 10:12“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him...”

2 Cor. 5:17“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Application: Christ has done this. This is the theological reality...but do you live by this truth? Do you see other believers

of other races, ethnic groups, different worship styles, and view them as fellow believers whom you are at peace with? Or, do you harbor contempt for certain groups of believers...do you look at them from a position of pride?

Unity should accompany belief vs. 19-22

“Consequently”, “So then” - NASB, “Therefore” - KJV – as a result of the unity that Christ has brought between Jew and Gentile...Paul shares three descriptions of how these truths emphasize the unity that should describe the Christian’s attitude and actions.

First, you are fellow citizens

“...you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people...”

In ancient culture, foreigners and aliens had a difficult existence in the land they were living in. They were always looked upon with suspicion – never accepted in the culture at large.

The “alien” referred to here would have been a resident alien – someone who had taken up permanent residence in a foreign land, but was not a citizen of the land they resided in. They had to pay a tax to live in a country that was not their own.

Paul says that the Christian is no longer an outsider – they are no longer an “foreigners and aliens” – they are citizen’s with God’s people. In Christ, the Jew and the Gentile were on level ground.

Second, you are in the same family

“members of God's household...”

The best way to explain this is through an illustration:

“Professor A.B. Davidson of New College, Edinburgh, was staying in a foreign city. He was lonely. He used to walk the streets in the evenings. Sometimes, through an uncurtained window, he would see a family sitting round the table or the fire in happy fellowship; then the curtain would be drawn and he would feel shut out, and

lonely in the dark.” (see The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, The New Daily Study Bible, by William Barclay, p. 136)

Believers are in the same family. This means that our bond is even stronger than if we are of the same country or of the same ethnic or racial background...we are family – and there is no stronger bond. Eph. 1:5“He...adopted us as His sons through Jesus Christ...”

Third, we are a strong *building*

“...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”

The strength of a building is from two things. First, and most important, it’s strength and stability is found in its cornerstone and foundation. If the cornerstone or foundation is weak, the entire building will eventually fall. Second, the rest of the structure must not only be connected to the cornerstone and foundation, but to itself. If you anchor the walls to the foundation, but don’t connect the walls to each other, the entire structure will be weakened. Paul not only addresses how we are anchored in Christ and the teaching of the Apostles and Prophets of the early church, and that we are joined together – but that we are a holy temple in which the Spirit of God lives. We are an integral part of a building (the Church) that has a significant purpose, to demonstrate the holiness of God and the Spirit of God to a lost world.

Application

How do you treat other believers...especially those who are different from you?

Those who are racially different?

Those who were saved from a life of extreme (from the human perspective) sin?

Those who lived a “clean” life?

Those who differ theologically not on the essentials, but on the “disputable matters” (Romans 14)?

Those who are older / younger?

Those who have a different style and taste of worship?

We need to love each other and value each other.

There can be no divisions or 'ranks' within the Body of Christ. This does not mean we all have the same role or function, Paul is speaking here of value – of intrinsic value that each believer has. Nobody in the church is more important or more valuable than another. There is no allowance for pride of oneself or disdain toward another believer within the church.

Let us make every effort to love one another – as Christ has loved us.

Close in prayer

Recite closing verses as Joseph plays softly on the piano.