



A Post Tenebras Lux Study on Ephesians...

One New Body...

Ephesians 2:11-22

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:11**...Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "**uncircumcised**" by those who call themselves "**the circumcision**" (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

If there was ever a person in the world that believed that doctrine was important, it is me. I believe what we believe matters. I hold to the Westminster Confession of Faith and I hold to all of the historic doctrines of Presbyterianism. I do not

believe that a person should teach in a Presbyterian church unless they are, in fact, Presbyterian. I think that is a matter of ethics and of conscience.

On the one hand, I believe that with all my heart.

On the other hand, I know we have an obligation to show kindness and generosity to those with whom we disagree. It is a matter of Christian unity and it is a matter of just plain old good manners. When the gospel is not in jeopardy, I can show a bit of latitude in my dealings with others. When it is in harm's way, I am willing at least intellectually to go toe to toe. That is why I like this story I got off the Internet.

"I was walking across a bridge one day," says an anonymous storyteller, **"and I saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. So I ran over and said, "Stop! Don't do it!"**

"Why shouldn't I?" he said.

I said, **"Well, there's so much to live for!"**

He said, **"Like what?"**

I said, **"Well...are you religious or atheist?"**

He said, **"Religious."**

I said, **"Me too! Are you Christian or Buddhist?"**

He said, **"Christian."**

I said, **"Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?"**

He said, **"Protestant."**

I said, "**Me too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?**"

He said, "**Baptist!**"

I said, "**Wow! Me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?**"

He said, "**Baptist Church of God!**"

I said, "**Me too! Are you Original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?**"

He said, "**Reformed Baptist Church of God!**"

I said, "**Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?**"

He said, "**Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915!**"

I said, "**Die, heretic scum**", and pushed him off the bridge.

Paul begins this wonderful section of Ephesians 2, with a reminder to his Gentile brothers and sisters that there was a time when they were on the outside looking in.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:11**...Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "**uncircumcised**" by those who call themselves "**the circumcision**" (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Paul says there was a time when the Gentiles, who were in his day were disparaged by the Jews as the Uncircumcision, were in truth actually alienated from God. Now they were deprecated by the Jews who thought of themselves as

the Circumcised even though Paul says their circumcision was made by human hands. But to explain the awful state of the Gentiles, in verses 11-12 Paul uses four phrases to remind them just how bad off they were:

(1) they were separate from Christ.

That means that they had no hope in the future Messiah. There have been those that have taught that saints in the Old Testament were saved by something other than Christ, but Paul will have nothing to do with that. For him, salvation whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament was always based upon what Christ accomplished on the cross. Old Testament saints looked forward to the cross; New Testament saints looked back to the cross, but it was always about Christ redeeming His people. This phrase is particularly graphic in light of the fact that Paul has already made such a point of Gentiles being **“in Christ”**. But there is more. Gentiles were also:

(2) excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.

(3) strangers to the covenants of promise.

Both of these ideas are closely linked. Gentiles had no part with the God's people. They shared neither in the blessings of the nation or in God's Covenantal blessings. They had no temple to meet God. They had no special revelation of God. That is why Paul says that:

(4) they were without hope and God in the world.

You see, we Gentiles were once lost, dead in trespasses and sins and we were completely oblivious to that fact.

That is why Paul's next list is so marvelous so comforting. Look what he says in verse 13-18.

NIV Ephesians 2:13...But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

You see we were separated from God; we were alone and without hope in the world. But Christ intervened. Paul uses three ideas to explain what he means:

(1) he brought peace to us who were once far off.

There is a sense in which Gentiles were excluded from the inheritance of God from the time of Abraham's call till the death of Christ. Now we do find references occasionally to Gentiles being converted, like Naaman the leper, or Ruth the Moabitess, or even the widow of Zarepath. It was unusual, however, that Gentiles were ever converted, but there are many promises in Scripture that God would, in fact, reveal Himself to other nations.

NAS Isaiah 49:6...He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

NAS Hosea 2:23..."And I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, And I will say to those

who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, 'Thou art my God!'"

^{NIV} **Isaiah 9:1**...Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan-- ² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. ³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.

(2) he broke down the dividing wall of the ordinances.

Christ broke down the dividing wall that separated Gentiles and Jews. There was a supernatural division that existed between the nation of Israel and the Gentile world around them. They were separated by the call of God and they were separated by the ordinances of God.

You remember, I imagine, the many food laws and clothing restrictions and other ordinances that separated the Jews from the Gentiles. I used to wonder why there were so many restrictions on the Jews. Sometimes they had a religious significance, demonstrating how God had separated them from the nations. At other times, the dietary laws may have been intended to divide Jews and Gentiles socially. There is a sense in which it is really hard to ever have unity with someone that you cannot eat with.

However, by Jesus' day the separation of the Jews and the Gentiles had turned intensely personal. The Jews did more than separate themselves from the food of the Gentiles; they had come to loath the Gentiles. In one sense, it is easy to understand why. The Jews had been an oppressed people, conquered and

humiliated. They were governed by pagans that worshipped idols and ate blood. But by Jesus' day they hated the sight of Gentiles. They called the Gentiles "**dogs**" and "**swine.**" Edersheim says in one of his books that Jews used to avoid even passing through Samaria for fear of being contaminated by their contact with Gentiles. That is why the disciples were so surprised to find Jesus talking to the woman at the well. They were shocked to find Him speaking to a woman and a Samaritan woman at that.

Some of the stricter Jews thought they were contaminated if the shadow of a Gentile so much as fell upon them. Rather than go on to worship and sacrifice they would turn around and go home and bath. Still, Gentile worshippers came. By the time of Jesus there were many Gentile worshippers who chose not to be circumcised but still wanted to worship Yahweh. And they were given access to the temple but it was strictly limited.

I asked you in your homework assignment to see if you could find out about the inscription written on the wall dividing Gentiles and Jews in the temple compound. What did you find?

James Montgomery Boice speaks about the warning signs posted at regular intervals on the wall that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of Women.

No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and embankment around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which follows. (Museum in Istanbul found in 1871)

If you want to see how seriously they took this warning there is even a passage in the book of Acts that explains how the Jews responded when they thought, merely thought, Paul had taken a Gentile into the restricted area.

^{NIV} **Acts 21:26...**The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them. ²⁷ When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸ shouting, **"Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place."** ²⁹ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.) ³⁰ The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut.

So, you can see that the Jews took this separation from Gentiles seriously. The Gentiles were to be divided and to stay divided. There is a sense in which it is highly ironic. They were to be light to the Gentiles but they hated the Gentiles. They were to proclaim the mercy of God but they showed no mercy. When I was preparing this lesson I could not help but think about the wonderful poem Robert Frost wrote back in 1914. It is called the **Mending Wall**. It's a poem about two neighbors that meet every spring to repair the stone wall that divides their property. Here's a little excerpt.

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:

'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.
... and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows?
But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down... (but) I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."
(Mending Wall by Robert Frost)

(3) he reconciled Jews and Gentiles to each other and to God.

Now one of the really interesting things about the Herod's temple is that the dividing wall that separated Gentiles from Jews was not the only dividing wall. There were others. There was a separation between the Courts of the Gentiles and Women, but there was also a separation between the Courts of Women and Men, and even Men and Priests. So while there was a clear demarcation between Jews and Gentiles there was also a clear demarcation between all people and

God. While the ceremonial law separated Jew and Gentile, the moral law separated men and God and it had to be that way. The law represented not only God's commands for all people; it also reflected His righteous, holy Person. Throughout the Bible it is the holiness of God that cannot permit unrighteousness to enter His presence. I love the way Moses records God's warning in Exodus 19.

^{NIV} **Exodus 19:20...**The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up ²¹ and the LORD said to him, "**Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish.** ²² **Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them.**" ²³ Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, 'Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.'" ²⁴ The LORD replied, "Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out against them." ²⁵ So Moses went down to the people and told them.

Do you see what Paul is arguing here? He is arguing that not only has the wall between Jew and Gentile been broken down but so has the wall between God and man. Look how he says it.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:14...**For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

You see the justice of God had to be settled. And when Christ died on the cross enduring God's righteous judgment of our sin, the enmity that separated us from

God and each other was laid to rest. That is the reason that when Christ died on the cross the veil of the temple was split from top to bottom. The wall of division separating God and man was done away with forever.

Finally, Paul reminds the Ephesians not only of their past and what Christ has accomplished but he also reminds them of the blessings they currently possess. Look at verses 19-22. Paul writes:

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:19**...Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Paul uses three separate metaphors to describe the present estate of the Ephesians. Look how he puts it. Gentile Christians are:

- (1) no longer strangers, they are fellow citizens.
- (2) they are no longer castaways they are a part of God's family.

Rather than being castaways, Gentiles are now included with God's people. That is what Paul meant, I think, in Romans when he asserted that:

^{NIV} **Romans 9:6**...It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "**It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.**" ⁸ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

^{NIV} **Galatians 3:6**...Consider Abraham: "**He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.**" ⁷ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.

But it is the last point that Paul makes in this section that is so wonderful. He says:

(3) Gentiles are no longer excluded from God's temple they are a part of its very fabric, its very makeup.

Now, imagine what a shock that would have been to the Gentiles. They had known something of the hatred and prejudices of the Jews. They had known what it meant to be called "**uncircumcision**" or even worse "**dogs**" or "**swine**". But now they are not only no longer excluded they are actually part of the very building blocks of God's new temple.

But Paul's point in all of this is for the Gentiles to realize their new found position in Christ. Later on he will speak more about Christian unity and peace and you can see, I think, how the argument will go. If the great wall of division that separated Jew and Gentile, even God and man has been done away then why should there not be unity among the brethren. How can we separate ourselves from each other and the genuine affection and love we ought to show each other, if God has already done as much for us in Christ?

In this place, we have people from all kinds of different cultures and backgrounds. We have people from different economic levels, different races, and different educational backgrounds. Yet, in Christ, we are united. In Christ, we cannot help but have genuine affection for other believers. That is why when

a person says something like, **“I just can’t stand to be around the people at that church”** it just boggles my mind. How can we say those kinds of things? How can we think those kinds of things? When I think of the kind of affection that we really ought to have for each other, I cannot help but think of my grandfather and his best friend Bidy Nipp.

When I used to spend time at my grandfather’s house in the summer, my grandfather and my cousin Buddy and I would almost invariably wind up at Bidy’s place two or three times a week. My cousin and I used to dread going over to Bidy’s place (You will notice I hesitate to call it a house). Bidy’s house was made of Bois’Darc posts buried in the ground vertically. The posts were then wrapped with tar-paper. The roof was made of galvanized sheets. The floor was dirt. There was no electricity, no water, no plumbing. My grandfather didn’t have plumbing indoor plumbing either but he had electricity, water and floors. Inside the house there lots of kids and lots of mattresses strewn about the floor.

When we would visit, we would go inside and my grandfather who was pretty feeble would plop right down on one of those mattresses, there were no chairs, like it was a fine leather sofa. My cousin and I would usually stand keeping a sharp lookout for bugs, ticks or other small critters. We had to...there were also several dogs in the Bidy’s house. We just could not wait to get out of there.

But my grandfather would act like it was home. We always dreaded him getting comfortable because if we lingered we knew that there was a chance it would happen and we dreaded the very thought of it. More than anything else in the world we dreaded the prospect of being asked to eat with Bidy. There was no stove. Everything was cooked outside on an open grill and there was absolutely

no telling from our point of view what actually might be on the plate we were offered.

One of the last times I visited Bidy's with my grandfather, it happened. They invited us to eat. My cousin and I made excuses but my grandfather just dug in like he was eating at the Waldorf. Finally, we left and when we were driving home my cousin and I ask my grandfather,

"Papa, how on earth could you eat with Bidy?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean how could you eat with him? Didn't you see how dirty that place was? I mean there could have been anything in the world in that stuff?"

My grandfather hesitated for a minute and then when a very soft voice and teared up eyes said something I have never forgotten. He turned and looked at us both and said,

"Boys, Bidy is my friend. He will always be my friend. I don't care what he puts on the plate, I would rather die than not eat it. Boys, this may be hard to understand but I would eat even if he spit in it."

Well, I can tell you it took me a long time to understand that kind of love and affection. But it is the same kind of love and affection we ought to feel for each other. Not because any of us is so lovely but because each of us who name the

name of Christ are beautiful stones that make up a part of God's temple that was bought with the precious blood of Christ.

Let's pray.