

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

EPHESIANS 2:11-22, *OUR SPIRITUAL UNION IN CHRIST*

A. Concerning spiritual union

1. Darrell Bock, ... *a major focus of this letter and of the Prison Epistles in general is the corporate nature of those who are in the body of Christ. Believers do not have a private faith; they have corporate relationship and responsibility to each other.*
2. Christians were not created by God to be spiritually independent but spiritually interdependent.
3. Thomas Constable, *God's plan for believers included the building of a new entity after Jesus Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension (cf. Matt. 16:18). It was to be the church.*

B. The union of Jews and Gentiles is made possible through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ (11-13)

1. Gentiles were reminded that they were once aliens to the covenant promises of God (11a)
 - a. **Therefore, remember**
 - 1) Paul encouraged the Ephesians to remember what they were before they came to faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 2) A key difference between Jews and Gentiles was that Gentiles had no relationship to the living God.
 - b. Gentiles were socially and spiritually separated from God by birth (11b), **that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—**
 - 1) Jews disparaged non-Jews by calling them uncircumcised.
 - 2) Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant relationship with the nation of Israel, an external sign of a spiritual commitment.
 - 3) Harold Hoehner, *This physical difference between Jews and Gentiles affected every area of their lives. A great social and spiritual boundary existed between them.*
 - 4) John Stott, *It is as if Paul is declaring the unimportance of names and labels, in comparison with the reality behind them, and hinting that behind 'what is called the circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands' there is another kind, a circumcision of the heart, spiritual not physical, which was needed by and available to both Jews and Gentiles alike.*
 - a) Romans 2:28-29, *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*
 - b) Colossians 2:11-13, *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*
 - 5) Warren Wiersbe, *But since the hour that God called Abraham, God made a difference between Jews and Gentiles. He made this difference, not that the Jews might boast, but that they might be a blessing and a help to the Gentiles. God set them apart that He might use them to be a channel of His revelation and goodness to the heathen nations.*
2. Gentiles lacked privileges that God had given the nation of Israel (12)
 - a. Again, Paul encouraged Ephesian Christians to remember that as Gentiles they had lacked much, **remember that you were at that time**
 - 1) Warren Wiersbe, *The one word that best describes the Gentiles is 'without.' They were 'outside' in several respects.*
 - 2) Harold Hoehner, *The Gentiles' lack of the external sign of circumcision also meant that they lacked five privileges that God had given the nation Israel.*
 - 3) It is good to take time to remember how blessed we are as Christians who were once without so much.
 - b. The things unbelieving Gentiles were *without*.
 - 1) They were without Christ, **separated from Christ**,
 - a) Gentiles had no personal nor national hope of a Messiah as did the nation of Israel.
 - b) H. D. M. Spence, *...having no knowledge of Christ, no interest in him, no life or blessing from him.*
 - c) Before Christ was proclaimed in Ephesus, Ephesians worshiped the goddess, Diana, and knew nothing about Christ.

- 2) They were without citizenship, *alienated from the commonwealth of Israel*
 - a) Individual Gentiles could be admitted into Judaism but Gentiles as a whole had no part in what God planned to do in and through Israel.
 - b) William Barclay, *In what sense were the people of Israel different from other peoples? In the sense that their only king was God. Other nations might be governed by democracy or aristocracy; Israel was a theocracy—a people ruled by God.*
 - c) Psalm 147:19-20, *He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules...*

- 3) They were without covenants, *and strangers to the covenants of promise,*
 - a) They had no direct part in the promises made by God to Israel.
 - b) Harold Hoehner, *These covenants—all pointing to “the promise” of the Messiah and of blessings through Him—assured Israel of a national existence, a land, a King, and spiritual blessings.*
 - c) The covenants of promise include
 - 1] Abrahamic Covenant, Genesis 12:1-3, *Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*
 - 2] Davidic Covenant, 2 Samuel 7:16, *And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.*
 - 3] New Covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-34, *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*

- 4) They were without hope, *having no hope*
 - a) Gentiles had no hope of a deliverer and no promises for the future.
 - b) William Barclay, *For the Jews, history was always going somewhere; no matter what the present was like, the future was glorious; the Jewish view of history was essentially optimistic. On the other hand, for the Gentiles, history was going nowhere...To the Gentiles, history was a progress to nowhere; to the Jews, history was a march to God.*
 - c) John Stott, *They were ‘hopeless’ because, although God had planned and promised to include them one day, they did not know it, and therefore had no hope to sustain them.*
 - d) Warren Wiersbe, *Historians tell us that a great cloud of hopelessness covered the ancient world. Philosophies were empty; traditions were disappearing; religions were powerless to help men face either life or death. People longed to pierce the veil and get some message of hope from the other side, but there was none.*

- 5) They were without God, *and without God in the world.*
 - a) Gentiles had no eternal point of reference whereas the Jew had the living God.
 - b) Harold Hoehner, *The Gentiles were in a desperate situation. They had no meaning, hope, purpose, or direction in life.*
 - c) John Stott, *...although God had revealed himself to all mankind in nature and therefore had not left himself without witness, yet they suppressed the truth they knew and turned instead to idolatry.*
 - d) Romans 1:18-20, *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

3. Jesus Christ is the means by which Gentiles have access to the covenant promises of God (13), ***But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.***
 - a. *But now*
 - 1) The great transition is *without Christ* to *with Christ*.
 - 2) Paul described the condition of a Gentile before faith in Christ as *far off* from God and the nation of Israel.
 - 3) It was a *without* condition as noted in verse 12.
 - b. Gentiles in Christ *have been brought near*.
 - 1) The difference between a Gentile and a Jew is not physical circumcision but spiritual circumcision.
 - 2) The distinctions that separated Jews from Gentiles are removed by Christ.
 - c. Gentiles are brought near by means of *the blood of Christ*.
 - 1) The *blood of Christ* refers to the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins which leads to spiritual union.
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *Because of Jesus Christ's death God has brought Gentiles near to Himself and to the Jews in a sense never before true. Sin results in death and separation. However, Christ's obedience resulted in life and reconciliation with other people as well as with God for Gentiles.*
- C. The result of Christ's work of establishing peace between Jews and Gentiles is that the new organism is a living, holy dwelling place of God (14-22)
 1. Jesus is peace between Gentiles and Jews (14-15a), ***For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances,***
 - a. Jesus made peace between Jews and Gentiles through His flesh.
 - 1) He is the source of restored relationship to God and between individuals.
 - 2) Galatians 3:28, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
 - 3) Darrell Bock, *This new institution does not dissolve ethnic distinctions, but displays reconciliation, with every believer equally qualified to share in the benefits of salvation and peace that emerge from the uniting of Jews and Gentiles into a new living community.*
 - b. He abolished the *dividing wall* between Jews and Gentiles.
 - 1) The *dividing wall* is the spiritual barrier between Jews and Gentiles.
 - 2) *Hostility* is Jew against Gentile as well as mankind against God.
 - 3) Jesus' sacrificial death signaled a change in how God dealt with mankind, no longer through the nation of Israel and the law but through faith in His Son.
 - a) Romans 10:4, *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *The body of Jesus sacrificed on the cross terminated the enmity between Jews and Gentiles. It did so in the sense that when Jesus Christ died He fulfilled all the demands of the Mosaic Law. When He did that, God ended the Mosaic Law as His rule of life for the Jews.*
 - c) John Stott, *Jesus certainly did not abolish the moral law as a standard of behavior (it is still in force and binding on his followers); but he did abolish it as a way of salvation.*
 2. His purpose was to unite them into one organism which is reconciled to God (15b-16), ***that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.***
 - a. He reconciled Jews and Gentiles, ending the hostility by creating *one new man in place of the two*.
 - 1) The word for *new* means new in quality not new in time.
 - 2) Harold Hoehner, *Gentiles do not become Jews, nor do Jews become Gentiles. Instead believing Jews and Gentiles become Christians, a whole new single entity.*
 - 3) Max Anders, *Since neither Jew nor Gentile had to obey the law to find salvation, the means of distinguishing between the two kinds of people vanished. Again, this created peace between hostile parties.*
 - b. He reconciled both groups to God.
 - 1) It was accomplished by Jesus' payment for our sins on the cross.
 - 2) Colossians 1:20-22, *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,*

- 3) Romans 5:10, *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*
 - 4) John Stott, *Christ crucified has thus brought into being nothing less than a new, united human race, united in itself and united to its creator.*
3. Jesus reconciled Gentiles and Jews to God through His sacrificial death (17-18), ***And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.***
- a. *and*
 - 1) Verse 17 is linked to verse 14 where Jesus is declared to be *our peace*.
 - 2) Here, Jesus *preached peace*.
 - a) Acts 1:8, *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*
 - b) Robert Wilkin, *He did not do this directly in His earthly ministry or even in His post resurrection appearances. Jesus was sent to Israel, not to the Gentiles. But He sent His apostles to preach peace with God in His name to the remotest parts of the earth.*
 - c) Matthew Henry, *When the messengers of Christ deliver his truths, it is in effect the same as if he did it immediately himself.*
 - b. The Gospel message was proclaimed to everyone.
 - 1) It was proclaimed to *you who were far off*, Gentiles, Ephesians 2:13, *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*
 - 2) Also, it was proclaimed to *those who were near*, Jews, note Isaiah 57:19, ... *Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,* "says the LORD, "and I will heal him.
 - c. Sinners have access to the Father through the Holy Spirit based on the work of Jesus Christ.
 - 1) Jewish and Gentile believers have access to God not through Judaism but by the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:13, *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*
 - 2) Harold Hoehner, *Here believers have access to God the Father through the Holy Spirit because of Christ's death on the cross.*
 - 3) Here, we see the work of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in our lives.
 - a) Max Anders, *The Father developed a plan of grace for salvation through faith. The Son carried out the plan in his ministry to Jew and Gentile and in his death on the cross. The Spirit became the means of immediate access to God the Father.*
 - b) Matthew Henry, *Christ purchased for us leave to come to God, and the Spirit gives us a heart to come and strength to come, even grace to serve God acceptably.*
4. Jesus' peace makes Jews and Gentiles fellow citizens in the household of God, the church in which Jesus is the Cornerstone (19-22)
- a. Gentile believers are fellow citizens with Jewish believers in the church (19), ***So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,***
 - 1) Gentile believers are no longer outside the household of God.
 - a) Ephesians 2:12, *remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*
 - b) They are reconciled to God through the work of Christ and have access to God by the Holy Spirit.
 - 2) They are fellow citizens with Jewish believers the new household of God.
 - a) The new household is the church, 1 Timothy 3:15, *if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*
 - b) They are also fellow citizens of heaven with all other saints of other ages, Philippians 3:20, *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*
 - 3) This new relationship does not mean that the church has replaced God's plan for Israel.
 - a) Christians are not incorporated into Israel but into one new group, the church.
 - b) God will complete what He started with Israel and fulfill all promises made to the nation of Israel.

- b. The church is a living structure built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone (20-21), ***built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.***
- 1) Paul compared the church to a temple.
 - a) Its foundation was the apostles and prophets.
 - 1] Ephesians 3:4-5, *When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*
 - 2] John Stott, *Since apostles and prophets were both groups with a teaching role, it seems clear that what constitutes the church's foundation is neither their person nor their office but their instruction.*
 - b) Its cornerstone is Jesus.
 - 1] This is the crucial part of the building's foundation.
 - 2] Harold Hoehner, *It was the stone with which the builder squared up every other stone including the other foundation stones...The church's foundation, that is, the apostles and prophets, needed to be correctly aligned with Christ. All other believers are built on that foundation, measuring their lives with Christ.*
 - c) It is a holy temple in the Lord.
 - 1] God does not inhabit a physical temple on earth as He did in Old Testament times.
 - 2] His spiritual temple is now the church spread all over the world.
 - 3] 1 Peter 2:5, *you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*
 - 2) This temple is constantly under construction.
 - a) New believers are being added throughout the church age.
 - b) The individual stones include Jews and Gentiles.
 - c) Harold Hoehner, *The word for temple always refers to the sanctuary within the physical structure in Jerusalem, not to the entire temple area with its open courts.*
- c. Individual believers compose the spiritual dwelling place of God (22), ***In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.***
- 1) The Ephesians were individual stones who were part of the dwelling place of God.
 - a) 1 Corinthians 6:19, *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,*
 - b) 2 Corinthians 6:16, *What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*
 - c) Darrell Bock, *Now His presence is dispersed, not localized. Now His presence is incarnated, instead of confined behind a veil.*
 - 2) Paul was reminding them that this temple of God is composed of Gentile as well as Jewish believers.
 - 3) The Holy Spirit cements the stones as one building, 1 Corinthians 3:16, *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*
 - 4) John Stott, *For now there is a new temple, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. It is his new society, his redeemed people scattered throughout the inhabited world. They are his home on earth.*
 - 5) The purpose of the church is for believers to *be built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Jesus came to break down the walls that separate man from God and man from man.
- B. The new dwelling place of God on earth is the church with each member indwelt by the Spirit of God.
- C. John Stott, *How dare we build walls of partition in the one and only human community in which he has destroyed them?*