

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The Source of True Unity

Ephesians 2:11-13

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PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb:

I. Introduction.

- A. When we talk about our faith it is usually in individual terms and it is understandable.
 - 1. And much of what I have taught so far in Ephesians has had a definite individual slant to it.
 - 2. But it is important to take note of how all of it has a strong, corporate flavor.
 - a. 2:8 "You all have been saved"
 - b. 2:1 "You all being dead in your sins"
 - c. 1:18 "All of you have your eyes of your heart enlightened"
 - d. 1:15 He rejoices in their love for all the saints. The emphasis is on the fact that they love the saints more than their love in itself.
 - e. 1:4 We are chosen as a group to be in Christ, which brings that whole into the fulness of the blessings.
 - 3. All of these have an individual component that we are able to rightly enjoy. In fact, as I said a several weeks ago that vss 1:3-14 are designed to transform us in how we view ourselves because we are in Christ.
- B. But what we cannot do is think only in individualistic terms. It is a battle, a true battle, in our culture to fight but the fruit of overcoming is sweet.
 - 1. One of the metaphors that the bible uses to describe the Church is a body.
 - a. It tells us that we are all part of that Body and we all have a place and a purpose in it. Therefore we are to care for one another as our own body naturally cares for its various members.
 - b. To separate yourself willfully from the Church is an aberration that the bible simply does not recognize.

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2. Along with the idea of individuals coming together to make the Body of Christ we also learn that there is no distinctions between races, classes and genders with regard to full membership or blessings in the Church.
 - a. I think this is one of the greatest blessings of traveling around the world that you give me. I have worshiped and taught Iranians, Arabs, Romanians, Brazilians Cameroonians, Nigerians, and Central Africans. It is humbling as well as invigorating.
 - b. The bible is clear on this subject.
 - (1) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)
 - (2) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)
 - (3) . . . in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (Colossians 3:11-14)
 - (a) Notice that final statement, ". . . the perfect bond of unity" for it is key.
 - (b) In our passage today Paul moves us fully into a situation that was very pressing in his time and still spills over to this day in various ways. What is the relationship between the Jew, the non-Jew (Gentile) toward Jesus Christ? Where do they fit? How do they relate to one another and to God Himself?
 - (c) **read 2:11-22**
- C. What Paul teaches in this section is no less transformational than what he taught in 1:3-14 or 2:1-10. Paul begins a frontal assault upon any attempt to marginalize any person or group from full acceptance and blessing in the Church of Jesus Christ.

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1. What Paul does in this section sets him and us up for the rest of Ephesians so we must pay attention here.
2. This passage may seem interesting only in a theological sense and therefore you may tempt yourself to check out if it holds no interest but I beg you to set your hearts to hear and to look at this text.
3. The passage is divided into three sections and that is likely how it will be preached (11-13; 14-18; 19-22). All of them have one common thread running through them, our union with Jesus Christ.
4. I want you to notice one other aspect that is worth our time to see. This section is in parallel with vss 1-7.
 - a. Note the hopeless situation the Gentile found himself in 11-12.
 - b. Then notice the "but now".

What happens is this, both the Jew and Gentile consider their terrible situation in vss 1-7 and give thanks to the Father for His immeasurable grace toward them. Then Paul deftly shifts to just the Gentiles (with the Jews listening in) and speaks to their terrible situation simply because they were not Jews and then shows both groups again the glorious grace that is shown to the Gentile and sets up why, therefore, the Jew cannot reject a Gentile believer.

II. The problem with being a Gentile (11-12).

- A. Most of us are Gentiles.
 1. To be one simply means you are not a Jew.
 - a. It is not something that a Gentile would use. Rather it is a Jewish term that is very exclusionary to emphasize their non-Jewishness.
 - b. The word is where we get "ethnic" from and was used in a negative manner by the Jew.
 - c. It would be like the Japanese term "Gaijin" which is used to all who are not Japanese.
 2. Though here he is speaking of all who are not Jewish by birth this has full application to any sense of sexism, class warfare or racism today.
- B. They are also called the "uncircumcision".
 1. Such an awkward term in our culture that I will not belabor its meaning. Look it up if you don't know what it means because it is not central to the point of the text.

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2. It is helpful to know that both the Jew and the Gentile would use this term in a negative manner.
 - a. For the Jew, they looked at all others and called them "uncircumcised."
 - b. But the Gentile would throw it right back at them and refer to them as the "circumcised."
 3. But most importantly is that the concept of circumcision was intimately related back to Abraham and the covenant that God made with him.
 - a. In Genesis 17 God repeated His covenant and promises to Abraham and then said that the sign that Abraham was to have that he was in covenant relationship with YHWH was to be circumcised.
 - b. This was then to be done to every Jewish male to show that they were people of the covenant.
 - c. But notice that this is made in the flesh. This is emphasizing that circumcision in itself is merely an external marker. It does not convey anything spiritually.
 - d. In the Old Testament later on God speaks that the people of Israel were to have hearts circumcised if they were to be true worshipers. This speaks of the people needing to be set apart for the Lord alone in their hearts.
- C. From here Paul then lists five problems for a Gentile that were impossible to overcome on their own (12). These problems, in turn, were incredible privileges enjoyed by all who were Jews.
1. "Without Christ."
 - a. This is the preeminent one. It is like 2:1 being dead in our trespasses and sins.
 - b. The term "Christ" refers to the promised Messiah of the Old Testament which would redeem Israel.
 - c. Not only were we all personally separated from God, which was also true of many Jews, but frankly there was no Messiah/Christ/Savior on our horizon.
 - d. Over and over Israel was told that they would rebel and reject YHWH. But just as often they were told that there would be One who would come as Messiah to bring them back to God.

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- e. So during the dark times in their history faithful Jews looked forward in great hope for that day. If you want to see the reaction when it happened in the birth of Jesus just listen to the words of Simeon in Luke 1:26-32.
 - f. Notice how Simeon understood that the Messiah was to be for the Gentiles as well, but no Gentile knew of this. They walked in darkness.
2. "Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel"
- a. The term for "commonwealth" has various meanings to it—commonwealth, citizenship, or way of life.
 - (1) Commonwealth speaks of the "state of Israel."
 - (2) Citizenship speaks of membership to a group.
 - (3) Way of life speaks the customs by which you lived.
 - b. Probably the best is citizenship but what is key to understand is that the Gentile was not "part" of Israel. There was a Jew and a non-Jew in the Old Testament way of looking at the world.
 - c. You may think this is a small thing, but think of yourself as a Babylonian or Medo-Persian and understand that the One True God was only going to bless and save a people through Israel and you are not Israel so what hope can you have? You are not Israel.
 - d. And if that does not work then think of the difference of being born into a Christian home versus a distinctly non-Christian home.
 - (1) The blessings of being in a Christian home is almost impossible to fully describe.
 - (2) To be raised in a non-Christian home offers no hope and there is no idea where that hope might even be found.
 - (3) And the arrogance that many a Jew had toward their Gentile neighbor is similar of that of a Christian with their unbelieving neighbor.
3. "Strangers to the covenants of promise."
- a. There was no relationship to the covenants God made with Israel.
 - b. "Stranger" speaks of being not just a foreigner but of one who has no rights in a country.

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- c. Notice here that he uses the plural of "covenant."
 - (1) Almost every time the New Testament uses this word it is singular.
 - (2) Along with this Paul attaches the genitive "of promise."
- d. This is a highly debated subject that cannot be delved into fully here.
 - (1) Many who are in the Reformed part of Christianity will see it as speaking of a theological covenant called "the covenant of grace." However, never does the bible speak of this concept; rather it is something developed theologically rather than exegetically.
 - (2) Others think it speaks of the laws of Moses but this is something that is utterly foreign to the New Testament. In addition the covenant made through Moses is one specifically for Israel.
 - (3) Others see it as the covenants of the Old Testament known as the Abrahamic covenant and then the New Covenant.
 - (4) Finally others, like myself, see this in reference to all covenants God made that were unconditional.
 - (a) The primary one is that made to Abraham in Genesis 15.
 - (b) The others actually flow from it, they are known as the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7:12-17 and the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31, 32 and Ezekiel 36.
- e. These covenants had many aspects to them.
 - (1) A promise to Israel to have a land.
 - (2) A promise of a continued offspring but more specifically of one of the offspring of David who would ultimately deliver the nation.
 - (3) A promise of a new covenant where God would truly know God and have God change their hearts.
- f. No Gentile nation was given these promises.

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- (1) this is again important because for the faithful Jew the promises of God in these covenants was what caused them to persevere.
 - (2) They knew God was faithful to His promises and so even in the midst of captivity or 400 years of silence they waited and raised children and grandchildren in the promises of God in the covenants.
4. "Having no hope.
- a. It is not that a Gentile had no sort of hope, but that they had no real hope.
 - b. Literally it is rendered, "hope not having" to emphasize that they walked in hopelessness even if they did not know it.
 - c. Think of this carefully because it is related to the revelation of God through His prophets. There was no true prophet bringing them God's Word therefore:
 - (1) They had no way of looking forward and finding comfort in anything God would do.
 - (2) They had no expectation of any sort that God might intervene in their lives.
 - (a) I think of the king of Ninevah. Not any knowledge of the impending judgment.
 - (b) No offer of forgiveness in Jonah's message.
 - (c) So at best he makes a guess, "When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." (Jonah 3:6-9)

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- (3) Finally, they did not know of the promise of the Messiah to come who would make all things right.
5. The fifth and final problem being a Gentile is that they were without God in the world.
 - a. This is not to say they were irreligious for the vast majority of them were very religious.
 - b. From their perspective the typical Gentile would be very religious. In fact they would usually refer to the Jew as those who were without God.
 - c. The term is ἄθεος and we obviously get "atheist" from it. It speaks of one who does not believe or is in contempt of the gods.
 - d. Though from a human perspective they were very religious and had many gods, from God's perspective they had none, for they did not know, believe or care about the one true God.
- D. So there is the Gentiles problem.
1. A people who did not and could not know God.
 2. As a result a mass of humanity like a trove of lemmings all leaping off of the cliff of eternity into an eternal existence under the judgment of their Creator and Lord.
 3. This is what the Gentile believer is to remember. This is what you and I should remember. Not as an individual but as a people group we had no hope.
 4. So individually and corporately we were in a desperate, hopeless condition and didn't even know it. Like blind, deaf mutes wandering in a wasteland and unable to know it all of us were in this condition.
- E. So where is hope to be found? In the God who intervenes

III. The glory of being in Christ (13).

- A. "But now."
1. Just as the words "but God" in verse 4 rise up like the sun after a dark night of storms, so too these words bring blinding, wonderful light into a hopeless darkness of existence.
 2. The word "now" speaks of time.
 - a. "Then" we Gentiles were without God.

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- b. But "now" we have something radically different because God has acted and intervened.
 - c. We who had no promises find out that before the foundation of the world that we would be full participants in the promises of God.
 - d. We who had no one to be our savior now find out that before we knew Jesus Christ that He knew us and bore our sins in our place.
 - e. We who had no hope now have eternal hope that is an anchor for our souls.
3. Notice the imagery used.
- a. We were far off.
 - b. The idea is that there was no sense of nearness to God. No awareness of Him. Even though He was nearby always from our perspective and reality He was not even a blip on our radar screen.
 - c. But now we have been brought near.
 - (1) Note that this is in the passive voice.
 - (2) It again is out of pure grace that we are near to God.
 - (3) It is His work to bring us to Himself. But not some vague work, but by the death of His Son.
 - (4) It is the Father who chose us.
 - (5) It is the Father who gave us as a people to His Son.
 - (6) It is the Father who loved us and therefore sent His Son into the world to redeem us.
 - (7) It is the Father who was pleased to pierce His beloved Son for our sins.
 - (8) It is the Father who drew us to His Son that we might believe
 - (9) It is the Father who sent us the Spirit to seal us until the final day of redemption.
 - (10) All of God and none of us to the eternal praise of the Triune God.

IV. Conclusion.

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- A. How?
- B. Yes by the blood of Jesus.
- C. But even more importantly by taking us who were far off and outside of Christ and placing us where? In Christ.
- D. And here Paul begins to make his point to both the Jew and the Gentile.
 - 1. To the Jewish hearing these words read, he would begin to realize that the Gentile Christian is not some second cousin who only participates in a secondary, lower level of salvation and blessing.
 - 2. To the Gentile hearing these words they would sit up straighter and be encouraged. They would be humbled at the mercy poured out upon them. They would begin to allow the fulness of the words heard so far from the beginning of this letter to flow over them and transform their thinking and perspective.
- E. What of you. Shall today be that day that you begin to see that in Christ you possess the fulness of the blessing of God? Might today be the day you shake of the dregs of the lies of this world and be filled with joy and hope?
- F. For those who do not believe, might today be the day you realize you have no hope apart from Jesus Christ? That you might put your full trust in what God did for us through Jesus' death and resurrection . Might today be the day you can say that you are saved from the wrath of God?

Community Group Questions

- **Talk about the parallels between being a Gentile in the days prior to Jesus and those growing up in a non-Christian home.**
- **What are some ways as Christians, even more specifically, as American Christians, can we see other Christians as second-rate? (If you don't think there is that thought process then slow down and think for it is rampant.)**
- **Have some of those who were raised in a non-Christian home describe their testimony to coming to Christ.**