

UNITED IN ONE BODY

Ephesians 2:11-22

Introduction:

→ Illust. – Sesame Street: Grover demonstrating the concepts of “near” and “far”. I’m reminded of that children’s show segment as I read through this passage.

Our text in Ephesians 2:11-22 is an extension of Paul’s teaching in the first 10 verses of the chapter. Both passages have a similar structure. Each falls into three divisions. The first division focuses on what we were in the past. The second division focuses on what Christ has accomplished. The third division focuses on the goal or result of this work. However, these two passages not only have their similarities, they also have their distinct emphasis and focus. Verses 1-10 tend to focus more on our condition as individuals, whether Jew or Gentile, while verses 11-22 concentrate on our standing as Jewish and Gentile believers corporately. Verses 1-10 describe us as “dead” in our transgressions and sins and “alive” in Christ. Verses 11-22 speak of our previous condition as “far” from God, His covenant people, and His blessings, while the work of Christ on our behalf has brought us “near.”

Life as an Unbelieving Gentile

In verses 11 and 12, Paul describes the Gentiles’ former condition from two very different perspectives. The first is from the point of view of the self-righteous Jew. The second is from the perspective of God Himself, and of His Word. The first perspective is external, the second is internal. The first is physical, the second is spiritual. The first is inconsequential, while the second is of eternal significance.

Self-righteous Judaism tended to look only at the outside, to judge according to external appearances. Judaism judged a man on the basis of whether or not he was physically circumcised. To be circumcised was, in their minds, to be a part of the covenant people, assured of divine blessing. To be uncircumcised was to be a heathen, destined for God’s eternal wrath.

To a staunch Jew of Paul’s day, a Gentile was just a pagan. They would look at us with nose in the air, as “one of those...” Remember that the people to whom Paul was writing—the members of the church in Ephesus—were primarily Gentiles, and this was the problem they were facing.

However, that is only the external perspective. From a spiritual perspective, the situation was far more serious for the Gentiles. Verse 12 cites for us a long list of problems.

- Separate from Christ - Christ is the “son of David,” who will rule eternally as Israel’s king. He was the “lamb of God” whom the prophets said would take away the sins of the world. He is the “seed of Abraham,” through whom the world would be blessed. He is the “prophet like Moses” for whom Israel looked. He is even the “rock” which followed the Israelites in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:4). He is the one and only way by which men may be saved.
- As unbelieving Gentiles, the Ephesians were formerly alienated and excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. The presence of God was associated with Israel, the place. Jacob first realized this as he was about to leave this special place (see Genesis 28:10-17). Solomon later acknowledged the same truth (1 Kings 8) when he brought the ark into the temple in Jerusalem. When foreigners wished to worship and serve God, it had to be in this same place. To be an Ephesian Gentile was to be removed from the nation and the place where God showered blessings upon man.
- Foreigners to the covenants of the promise - To be an unbelieving Gentile also meant that one was a stranger to the covenants of God, the covenants by which God promised to bless His people. First and foremost among these covenants was the Abrahamic Covenant. God purposed and promised to bless all the nations of the earth, but this blessing was only through the “seed of Abraham” and only to those who blessed him. To be a Gentile was to be a stranger to God’s covenants. (See Romans 9:4-5)
- The desperate condition of unsaved Gentiles is now summarized by two phrases, “having no hope,” and “without God in the world.” Godless and hopeless; this is what we Gentiles are without faith in Christ.

In v. 13 we have the summary – “...you who once were far off...” Far from God, and without hope in this world.

The Change Christ Made

v. 13 is also a transition verse. "But..." Once we were far away, without hope and without God. But now that has all changed. We have been brought near, and the agent which brought about the change is the blood of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at what Christ has accomplished as laid out in vv.14-18. I want to draw your attention to three key things in these verses:

1. He destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility – v. 14. What was this barrier that caused such hostility between Jew and Gentile?

Well, in the Old Testament times, a Gentile usually expressed faith in Messiah by identifying with the Jews: eg. Ruth and Rahab.

There were also those who came to faith in the God of Israel who did not become Jewish proselytes. One early believer, a contemporary of Abraham, was Melchizedek, the king of Salem (Genesis 14:17-20). Another believer was Naaman, the Syrian captain (2 Kings 5). And there was the population of Nineveh, who heeded the warning of Jonah and repented (Jonah chapter 3).

But many of the Jews believed that if a Gentile were to enter into the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, he must first become a Jewish proselyte. They insisted that in order to enter into a relationship with God, a Gentile must be circumcised and must submit to the Law of Moses.

The Law of Moses became a kind of invisible barrier, separating Jews and Gentiles. The Jews felt that because they possessed the Law, they had a special relationship with God, and they disdained the Gentiles because of their ignorance of and disregard for the Law.

There was also a very real dividing wall when it came to the worship of God in the temple. The temple consisted of several courts, each one coming progressively closer to the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God. There was the court of Gentiles, women, Israelites, Priests, the Holy Place. Mention Paul and Trophimus in Acts 21.

Jesus Christ removed that barrier that separated Jew and Gentile. How? See v. 15a, Col. 2:13-14. Expand.

2. His purpose in doing this was to create a new body out of the two. Gentile saints are not merely given membership in Judaism, both Jews and Gentile are reconciled to God in a new way, a way which removes the barrier which for so long divided them. God reconciled Jews and Gentiles to Himself as one entity, and that entity is not Israel or Judaism, but our Lord Himself. That new entity is the church, which is neither Jewish nor Gentile in nature.

3. He gave everyone equal access to the Father, through the Holy Spirit (v. 17-18). Distance is no longer of any consequence. Whether we were near or far away, in Christ we all have the same access to the Heavenly Father.

A New Relationship in Christ

So what are the results of this for us? There are several things: *Go through vv. 19-20.*

As a result of the work of God on our behalf, Jews and Gentiles are being built up into a temple in which God Himself dwells (verses 19-22). Gentiles are no longer foreigners, they are citizens. They are no longer strangers; they are members of God's own household (verse 19). God no longer dwells in a building made with human hands, He dwells in the church, of which Jesus Christ is the head. The apostles and prophets laid the foundation for the church, and now it is continuing to be built up, to be completed just before our Lord establishes His kingdom on earth. There are not two different walls, one Jewish and the other Gentile. The walls are made up of Jewish and Gentile saints, made one in Christ.

Conclusion

If there is anything which this text teaches us it is that God has created something entirely new and unexpected in the birth of the church. Jews are no longer distinguished from Gentiles. Gentiles need not become Jews to be saved and to enter into the blessings which God promised Abraham. The church is a new entity, born by the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church. Everyone who believes in Christ is a part of His body. *See Gal. 3:28.*

There are a few important take-aways from this text that we need to consider as we close this morning.

- Racism and discrimination have no place in the church. (Illust. – “Do we really want those kind of people in our church?”)
- It is unbiblical to think of an individual coming to personal faith in Jesus Christ, and yet somehow not becoming associated with and committed to a local church.
- Jesus Christ is the key to reconciliation. The hostility between Jews and Gentiles is deep-rooted and intense. World peace efforts today fail to grasp the depth of this division, or to comprehend that only Jesus Christ can make enemies fellow-saints. Christ alone is the key to reconciliation. Apart from Him, there can and will be no real and lasting peace.

And finally, let me say that Jesus is the only answer to the sin problem that separates us from God. Personal reconciliation with God is possible only through faith in the work of Jesus Christ.