

## Ephesians 2:11-16 "One Body Through The Cross"

In this letter to the Ephesians, especially here in the second chapter, Paul has taken these people on an adventure through their own lives by contrasting their former lives with their present. He's told them how they were dead in their trespasses and sins. And then he explains how God, being rich in mercy, then saved them and gave them life in Christ Jesus as He caused them to be "made alive."

He then goes on to say that they didn't deserve this new life, since it is by grace through faith that they have it. They didn't earn it. And then he encourages them with the truth that God is the One responsible to mold them and fashion them in His likeness since we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

But now Paul is about to take them back to the past once again as he reminds them of how there was a time when all Gentiles were separated from the mercy of God. And so we come to our text this morning.

EPH 2:11-12 "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 essentially says here, 'therefore, in light of what I told you about your former condition and now that you've been given life in Christ, REMEMBER. This is such an important concept. Remembering those things that relate to our life in the living God and how we came to know the Lord.

This word "remember" in the Greek gives the sense to call to mind, to hold in memory. In other words, to have this sense of awareness of those things that took place in the past, and to consider them in a way that motivates you in the present.

This is similar to what Jesus told the disciples at the last supper when He "took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in *remembrance* of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (LUK 22:19-20)

It wasn't as though Jesus was just suggesting to put this information into your memory as a catalog of past events. This was to be an ever-present reminder to always keep in mind what it took to purchase our salvation, and to appreciate and then act on that truth.

The past is meant to be a way to affect our present as well as our future in a positive way. And what Paul wanted to have these Gentiles remember was that they did not share in the blessings of Israel in the past, and that most of Israel looked upon them as the dung of the earth, but now all of that changed in Christ.

In verse 11 Paul brings in an interesting sign which distinguished Israel from the Gentiles; it was the covenant sign of circumcision. Notice what Paul says here.

EPH 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) -..."

Paul is showing the tension that exists between the Jew and the Gentile. The Jews regarded themselves as "the circumcision". It was seen as a special badge which they wore proudly. But they had used that sign of circumcision in such a way as to miss the point of what the sign meant. They used it to mean that they were somehow better than anybody else.

And as Paul writes here in verse 11, the Gentiles were regarded as "the uncircumcision". It's kind of like the un-cola, 7UP. The un-cola is not a cola it's something else. Well, to the Jew the Gentile was certainly something else. They were uncircumcision in that they were unwelcome by them and God, as far as they were concerned.

There truly was a hatred between many a Jew and Gentile in Paul's day. Many of the Jews hated Gentiles and the Gentiles returned the favor. In fact, in Jerusalem, in the temple area which separated the court of the Gentiles from the temple proper, there was a sign which archaeologists have discovered which reads, "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death."

The epitome of the hatred the Gentiles had for the Jews was seen in A.D. 70 when the Roman government destroyed Jerusalem and the temple along with thousands of Jews. Unfortunately, this antagonism was also found among many Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. And the issue at hand had to do with the law and grace.

Many Jewish believers insisted that to be saved one must also be circumcised as they believed on Jesus Christ. Well, you can imagine how that played out among Gentile Christians who believed that you are saved by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Well, when Paul caught wind of this happening in the Galatian church he came out of his chair. He told them that to add the law to salvation was tantamount to giving people a different gospel which brought death, not life.

GAL 1:6-9 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

Those are strong words, but this is a strong delusion which suggests that there is something we need to add to the finished work of Christ. To add the law or anything to our salvation puts us in bondage, not freedom. And this idea that circumcision made you holy was abhorrent to Paul.

GAL 5:1-5 "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. 2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope."

Back in our text Paul makes the statement that this circumcision is only made by human hands and as such cannot impart spiritual life. This physical cutting off of the flesh was never intended to be the means of life, it was a reminder of how the flesh needed to be cut off to where dependence was not put in the flesh but in the One who created the flesh.

Simply cutting off the flesh, as a way to show the world how special they were, the Jews in essence just ended up mutilating themselves. This is exactly what Paul told the Philippians as he warned them against these Jewish legalists who thought they were being pious when in fact they were doing something else.

PHI 3:2-3 "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh -..."

You see, here Paul made a distinction between physical circumcision and spiritual circumcision. Circumcision was an important sign in Israel to show how God is the One who cuts out the flesh which is cursed to die because of sin. It is God who does a real circumcision of the heart and does a spiritual surgery, if you will, and gives new life, not just restoring the old fleshly life. We see this as Paul wrote to the Colossians.

COL 2:11-14 "In him [in Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, [Or the flesh] not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross."

This is the circumcision God desired for Israel to see as he gave them a physical sign to point to the spiritual reality. After all, a sign is actually pointing to the actual thing signified; in this case the taking away of the fleshly sinful man and replacing it with a spiritual life by faith in the Messiah. God speaks of this when he inspired the prophet Jeremiah.

JER 9:25-26 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh - 26 Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the

desert in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart."

Here Jeremiah actually considers the Jewish nation as being no different from the Gentile nations surrounding her, in that they were both uncircumcised. The Gentile nations were really uncircumcised in the flesh and Israel is uncircumcised in the heart, which nullifies the fleshly sign.

That's why Paul could also write in ROM 2:28 "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical."

The emphasis in our text is to show these Gentile believers that there is a fleshly circumcision which was designed to signify a spiritual circumcision which only God can perform. This physical sign was given to Israel to show them the privilege they shared in being called out by God who desired to bestow His grace on them.

As the called out people of God Israel had many advantages. And Paul speaks of these when writing to the Romans.

ROM 9:4-5 "...Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."

God was constantly giving Israel His revelation and grace. And yet they substituted the signs for the things being signified and then they elevated these signs for the real thing and lost sight of the real thing; the Messiah who would come to give a circumcision of the heart as God opened their eyes to embrace this Messiah by faith.

Paul is saying in Ephesians that these Gentiles were cut off from all of these advantages which Paul mentions in Romans. And he says, *remember* that this was your state. *Remember*, that you did not know what it was to have God in your presence. *Remember*, that 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." (Eph.2:12)

Paul is painting a picture of something rather bleak. And this picture shouldn't be lost on us. He's actually painting a picture for all of us, because this was the state, in which all of us were, outside of Christ.

That's what Paul wants us to remember. Don't forget where you came from. Don't forget the lostness of your condition and the hopelessness of your future outside of being circumcised from above, with heavenly hands which have taken out that heart of stone and given us a heart of flesh, able to be molded and fashioned in the image of our God and Savior through faith in Him alone.

It should be pointed out however, that even though the Gentiles were separate from Christ and excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, it does not mean that God did not have them on His heart. Keep in mind what Paul says at the beginning of this letter.

EPH 1:3-4 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

These same Gentiles spoken of in chapter 2, as being excluded from Israel and all the blessings associated with Israel, are the same ones being addressed in the beginning of this letter as having been chosen before the foundation of the world. God had always planned on bringing them into a relationship with Himself.

This is also seen in the covenant God made with Abraham, who lived in the land of Ur of the Chaldees. He called Abram out and told him "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of *many nations*. No longer will you be called Abram [Abram means exalted father]; your name will be Abraham, [Abraham means father of many] for I have made you a *father of many nations*. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. (GEN 17:4-6)

There would be a multitude of nations who would come from Abraham, but more important, there would be a multitude of people's who would share in the spiritual blessings. These blessings would be a personal relationship with the living God through faith in the seed of Abraham, the Christ.

And so, simply to be a physical descendant of Abraham did not assure the Jew that he was automatically in a personal relationship with God. Even Israel was told to believe God, which is to place their faith in Him and His promises. Paul brings this out in the letter to the Romans.

ROM 9:6-8 "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." (Gen. 21:12) 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."

By the way, the name Israel essentially means "Governed by God". And so, Paul is actually saying in the above verse, "For not all who are descended from Israel are "Governed by God". Rather it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring, those whose hearts are governed by God through faith in Christ.

And this is where Paul is going in our letter to the Ephesians. Though the Gentiles may not have shared in the common wealth of Israel it does not mean God excluded them from His plan to redeem a people for Himself from all nations. And Paul tells us how this happened.

EPH 2:13-16 "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."

Paul is saying, 'You Ephesians must remember how you were once separate, but now don't ever forget or lose an appreciation of where you presently stand because of the Christ promised to come through Israel.'

This is an amazing portion of Scripture because it gives us the mind of God concerning this world and His desire to bring all of His people, from every tribe and tongue and nation, under the one roof of grace found in Christ. Despite how all of us were far away, we've brought near through the blood of Christ. Again, notice how Paul is giving us another contrast. Far away, brought near.

This is a beautiful picture of the personal nature of God coming near to us and extending this grace found in Christ. The thing which caused us to be far away is our sin. It separates and causes an estrangement and enmity which can only be cured through the curse of death being taken out of the way. And this was always meant to be given to God's people who are taken from all men in all of the world.

JOH 10:16 "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

Here the sheep who are not of "this pen", are the Gentiles who were separate from the flock found in Israel. Now, Christ comes to bring all of His people together, who will be part of one flock with one Shepherd.

GAL 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

But never forget what brings us near to God; the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Outside of a perfect sacrifice we are still at war with God separated from Him forever. But now instead of war, peace is brought near to us.

EPH 2:14 "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,..."

The hostility Paul spoke of in verses 11 and 12 has been taken out of the way. No longer is God dealing exclusively with the nation of Israel. Now, we are all included in this grace. And it is the peace which God extends to us in His Son which makes it all possible.

You might remember the prophecy about the child who would be born of the woman who would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (ISA 9:6)

Jesus is that Prince of Peace. And this is seen as being fulfilled in LUK 2:14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Oh, to be at peace with God instead of being at war with Him where we can only lose for eternity! It is this peace which we must rejoice in. Paul speaks of this peace in a variety of places including the letter written to the Church in Rome.

ROM 5:1-2 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

This peace is real and it affects relationships on both a horizontal and vertical level. This peace in Christ also allows men to be at peace with one another; a horizontal relationship. This is what Paul means in our text when he says that Christ "has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,..."

That which divided Israel and the Gentile world was the law of God, which Israel used as touchstone to see whether one was truly of God or not. Jesus came to abolish that which would keep us separate. This does not mean He came to abolish the law, rather He came to fulfill it. But in doing so it did abolish our need to keep it for the sake of salvation.

The law has a purpose, but it's primary purpose today is to lead us to Christ, not to save us or even to sanctify us as we somehow obey the law to measure our holiness.

Our holiness is wholly in the finished work of Christ and our sanctification comes through growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior as the Spirit takes His word and applies it to our hearts.

**John 17:5,17** <sup>5</sup> "Now, Father,....." <sup>17</sup> "aSanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

This is the sense in which all of the rules and regulations and all of the man-made laws which the Jews attached to their religion, would now give way to the circumcision of the heart which all in Christ could now enjoy.

And so Paul continues in our text.

EPH 2:15 "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,..."

How did Jesus abolish this barrier? In His flesh as He came into this world as promised way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden when He told them that the seed of the woman would crush the head of Satan. It could only be done in the flesh because the penalty was imposed on the flesh, that is on Adam and Eve who were flesh and bone, human beings.

To take our debt as He took our place God had to come into this world in the flesh and die in our place as He took our guilt of sin, though guiltless and sinless. He did this to make all men one in Him, who would be part of one flock, not two.

EPH 2:16 "and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."

To be reconciled is to be at peace with our Creator. Both groups can come to God through the same means, the cross of Jesus Christ. And it is through the cross that our hostility to other believers, whether Jew or Gentile, has been taken out of the way as well.

We are now part of the same family. That doesn't mean we have to embrace everything part of this family might be doing. Our fellowship is based on the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that cannot be compromised.

But the point Paul is making is that the way has been made for peace with each other, but more importantly peace with our God. No longer do we come under the condemnation of God and His wrath, spoken of in Eph.2:1-3. Now we have real peace, not an imaginary one.

Now we have truly been reconciled to God and can enjoy His fellowship. But this fellowship must not be presumed to be through anything less than the death of the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

I like the way the NAS puts verse 16 of our text when it says, [He] might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by having put to death the enmity." The enmity itself is seen as a personal barrier to keep us from God. And in a very real sense it is because it's our personal sin.

Life is given to us as this enmity, this war, is put to death, no longer to be master over us because our Master is alive.

ROM 6:9-12 "For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

If we are no longer at war with God may we walk in this peace as we proclaim this grace of peace found in Christ by faith. Sin is what kept us at war with God. Let us flee from its temptations and destructive ability. Our enmity has been put to death, let us walk in this peace and life we have in Christ, relying on the God who is peace.

Paul put it well in 1TH 5:23 "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."