

Ephesians 2:16-22 "One Body Living For Christ's Glory"

When we began this second chapter I gave you an overview outline which in a nutshell is, who we were, who we are, and what we can become together in Christ. Who we were outside of Christ were people dead in our trespasses and sins, according to verses 1-3. Who we are in Christ, are sinners saved by grace, as we see in verses 4-10, and what we can become together in Christ is where the rest of chapter 2 will take us.

Last week we saw how God's plan of salvation was always meant to be all inclusive. In other words, despite God calling out a specific people to carry His name to His glory, namely the Jewish nation, God clearly shows us that He desires a personal relationship with men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (Rev.5:9)

But the problem many of the Gentiles faced in the early days of the church was that they were often seen as second class Christians among some Jewish Christians. They didn't possess much of the religious refinement most of the Christian Jews possessed. The Jew was brought up on the word of God and the covenants and the prophets and the promises and the law.

And so, when the Gentiles came to Christ, there was some pressure placed on them by some Jews to show their true allegiance to God by getting serious about the ordinances delivered by God through Moses.

And the thinking was, 'if it was good enough for us Jews to submit to, then it's good enough for you Gentiles to submit to. We're the ones who were originally chosen, and we ought to know what's best for you.'

What Paul is doing here in Ephesians is demonstrating how these Gentiles are received by God, not on the basis of Christ plus the law, but on the grace of God found in Christ alone. Therefore, they are now on equal footing with the Jew, who also came to have their sins forgiven in the exact same way, and so the Gentile Christians don't have to view themselves as second class, because God doesn't.

And Paul is explaining that instead of two Christian camps, the Jews and the Gentiles, there is only one.

EPH 2:13-15 "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,..."

Our peace with Christ is totally dependent on the cross of Christ, where His body was broken and His blood was shed on our behalf. The enmity we once experienced from God was poured out on our Savior as He bore the entirety of our guilt and took it out of the way as He died for the penalty of our sin.

There is no peace with God outside of this arrangement, because there is no way you or I could deliver ourselves from the guilt we possess. That's why God told Adam and Eve that someone else would have to be sent to do it for them; someone who would keep perfectly the law they failed to keep.

And now in Christ both Jew and Gentile come under the same Head, the same Lord, the same God who now makes the two into one. And so, we see in verse 15 Jesus is creating in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace.

As Jesus is the Creator of this universe He is also the one who creates a relationship which we can share with Him, and this relationship is based on peace as He has totally satisfied the demands of God's justice so that we can approach the throne of God through Christ's righteousness.

But the point Paul makes here in our text is that in the process of Christ making peace for us with God, He also makes peace for us with other people in this world who share in the peace of God through faith in Christ.

There was a division among people and evidently among other Christians, simply because of cultural and ethnic barriers. Now, it should be noted that there are many categories of legitimate division mentioned in the Scriptures. Don't be yoked to unbelievers, don't follow after the ways of this world, separate yourselves from false teaching and teachers.

But, there is no such thing as making divisions among other people based on culture, color or ethnicity. It simply is not part of God's word. And so, for any Christian to divide himself from other believers based on that is simply out of accord with God's will.

Now, this doesn't mean that there won't be people of like background and race gravitating toward one another and having fellowship with one another. But when that fellowship takes on the appearance of being exclusive then we've essentially taken the "one man in Christ" concept and made two, or divided the Body along those lines, which is what many of the Jewish Christians did in the early church by determining that fellowship with them would be based on something other than the truth of God's word as they added things like circumcision.

And so the Church sometimes ended up becoming more of a cultural country club than a place where sinners of every stripe could come to find peace and fellowship with Christ and other believers who are sinners saved by grace.

Our Lord does not want this division based on our culturally restrictive bent. He wants reconciliation between all groups in Christ, but He wants that reconciliation based on truth and love and peace.

EPH 2:15-17 .. "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."

Praise God there is no discrimination with Jesus Christ. Peter, a zealous Jew at one time, was taught this by God in the book of Acts.

ACT 10:34-36 ... "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."

This peace which Paul speaks of in Christ, in our text, and this reconciliation between both God and man, is meant to have a softening effect among people so that we can bear with each other and love one another.

Paul wants these Gentiles to be able to look at these Jewish Christians, not as adversaries, but as brothers and sisters in Christ who have the same God and Lord who loves them both. And if God loves both then we should be able to love one another.

Paul points this out to the Colossians.

COL 3:11-14 "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. 12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

Paul is talking about daily relational interaction with other believers. And the way in which we do that is to try and see people the way Christ sees them; covered by His blood and therefore at peace with God and peace with each other.

What has happened in the Church today is that there appears to be more division than reconciliation. It's no wonder the world looks at the Church and wonders why they don't get along. Unfortunately, the Church has had a tendency to divide over silly and foolish things.

And when I talk about division I mean that which is used as the litmus test for our fellowship in Christ. Can I have fellowship with other believers who don't hold to an eschatology which I hold to? In other words, can I have fellowship with a person who believes that there will not be a literal thousand year reign of Christ on this earth, or vice versa?

Can I have fellowship with a believer who insists that the proper way to water baptize someone is by sprinkling instead of immersion? What about believers whose Church has a different form of government than ours, can we have fellowship with them in Christ?

These types of things are not the basis for division as far as our fellowship with each other is concerned. Obviously, they've become reason enough for dividing out, for conscience sake, and holding these particulars as important, but they don't need to divide us from working with each other with a common goal of furthering the Kingdom of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We don't have to approach other believers, as did some of the Christian Jews in the first century, thinking that we're better than them because we do things this way, or that we're holier than them because we have a much better handle on things like baptism, or our worship is better than yours because we use the hymns, or we don't use the hymns, or we have a real Church because we have a steeple.

Do you see the types of things which can divide, which Christ says, shouldn't divide? If you want to have a steeple or sing out of the Psalter or not, that's fine, but if I don't happen to belong to your particular group give me enough freedom and liberty in Christ to worship my Lord in Spirit and in truth in a way which might be a little different.

What Paul was dealing with was a combination of attitudes and truth. On the one hand he didn't want a wrong attitude to divide. In other words, simply because you, as a Jew, spent your entire life practicing the law and now you've been set free in Christ, don't use that as a wedge between other believers who never practiced the law.

On the other hand, he didn't want the law to become a doctrinal issue, where it was added to salvation in Christ alone. At that point there was to be division. And this is where many Churches today have gone in the opposite direction.

Many Churches today recognize that there should be more unity among other believers, but in some cases they put aside the importance of the word of God as being essential in our ability to grow up in Christ.

The problem with this approach is that you achieve a false unity at the expense of God's truth. And so the temptation is to embrace everyone without using discernment. It may be one thing to have fellowship with a believer who believes the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit have ceased, it's an entirely different thing when that believer promotes unity with others who preach a different gospel.

This is why the ecumenical movement is so dangerous. It's a movement which embraces anyone who names the name of Christ without considering the hazards that can go along with that, namely, giving the impression to people that truth doesn't matter, only the unity we can achieve.

Paul certainly wants unity but he would never compromise the truth to get it. And especially as the Gospel was being trashed Paul was adamant about cutting that poison out and getting rid of it. One of the first councils the early Church had dealt with this very issue.

We normally think of the early church as not having any problems and that everyone loved each other and it was a pristine church in those early days. Well, that simply wasn't the case. Turn with me to Acts chapter 15.

ACT 15:1-6 "Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas

were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. 3 The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. 5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." 6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question."

The answering of this question was essential in determining what this gospel of Jesus Christ was all about. Peter summed it up when he spoke at this council in Jerusalem:

ACT 15:9-11 "He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

By the way, most believe it was prior to this event in Jerusalem that Peter had a run in with Paul over this very issue of dividing over the law, which in essence added to the finished work of Jesus Christ.

GAL 2:11-13 "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. 12 Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray."

It's in this same letter to the Galatians that Paul addresses this issue of adding to, or distorting the Gospel with additional non-biblical teachings.

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!"

If these aren't divisive words I don't know what are, but they're legitimate divisions to stay away from error which effects the central teaching of the Gospel as well as the way in which people are sanctified, which is through the truth of God's word.

As a practical application, we need to be very discerning of false teaching today in the Body of Christ and reveal it for what it is and encourage other believers to lay it aside in favor of the sure Word of God. We certainly want to do that in love, but we must do it none the less.

Paul tells us in 1TI 1:3-6 "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work -which is by faith. 5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 6 Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk."

Bad doctrine will always produce bad results in the life of people. It will keep us enslaved to the ways of man instead of being nurtured on the pure milk of the word in which we grow in respect to salvation.

In that sense division is actually promoted by God for the purity of His Body. When false teachings and their teachers will not adhere to sound teaching it is better for them to be outside of the Body than to continue to have the opportunity to upset the Body.

This is why Paul could write to Titus in TIT 3:9-11 "But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. 10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. 11 You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."

If such bad teaching causes a decision for division then it must be a division which has the truth at the center. I point this out because in our text in Ephesians Paul is not suggesting that this reconciliation and peace we should have with each other should preclude laying aside the essential teachings of our faith in Christ.

His position has been to show how simply being a Jew or a Gentile should not be a point of division. Again, this assumes that our fellowship with each other is based on truth. But, for the Gentile believer in Paul's day this was earth shattering news to think that they, together with chosen Israel, have access to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

EPH 2:19-20 "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."

This was amazing news to the Gentiles. Not only were they not foreigners and aliens, they were actually fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. They are now family. Family with Jewish believers, but even more important, family with the living God who calls them children and encourages them to call Him Father.

This is what the apostle John conveys in his letter of 1JO 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!..."

This is the relationship you and I have with each other, and with our God. There was a time in which we were separate from the family of God because of our sin and rebellion. To be outside

of this family is to be outside of its benefits and the inheritance we can only obtain through Christ who is head over this family.

But now as Paul says in GAL 3:26-29 "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

As far as God is concerned you are His special child. You belong to Him in Christ. As such He will never let you go. He didn't come into this world to die for you and then not also have every intention of bringing you home to Himself.

This is why Jesus proclaimed: "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (JOH 6:39-40)

The other verse that excites me is found in JOH 10:27-30 "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

This is the message we are to give to the world, that they too may know this God and come to Him by faith in Christ. This Christ is the very foundation of our eternal destiny. This truth is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." (EPH 2:20-22)

Paul uses the imagery of a building which makes up God's people. But the very cornerstone of this building is Jesus Christ Himself. And what this building is doing is being joined together with the express purpose of becoming a dwelling in which God lives. In other words, you and I have the privilege and the responsibility to grow in this relationship to where Christ is exalted in our lives.

This in part is what Paul means when he says, "[we are rising] to become a holy temple in the Lord." You and I are not just part of any building, we are part of a temple set apart for the Living God and Creator of this universe. And as with the temple in Jerusalem it symbolized the very place where God resides with His people.

So too, we are to be the kind of temple where the world sees Jesus Christ residing in our midst. It's when there is no reconciliation or peace and unity that the world wonders if Christ really does reside there.

This is Paul's point, along with the truth that this temple is to be growing and maturing and showing itself to be alive. Most people don't associate a building with being alive, but Christ is

showing us that this building is most certainly alive. It is a dynamic building because of the One who resides in it.

You and I are indwelt and filled with the Holy Spirit who brings life to this individual building, called our bodies, but we are part of a bigger house in which all the Body of Christ resides. This Body is made up of many parts, but we fit together with the express purpose of working like a fine tuned machine.

And when each part is doing its part this Body of Christ will accomplish great things for God as we bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all men, both Jew and Gentile. Being a part of this family, this house, carries with it the privileges of belonging to such a family. And with privilege comes responsibility.

We are called to fit into this living building made up of people like you and me. But unless we make the effort to fit we will be like a building with extra parts that don't seem have a function. Every one of us have a vital function with gifts that need to be shared and utilized.

May we fit and work in this most holy temple which Christ indwells, this Body of Christ. And may we use the gifts He's given us to His honor and glory as we show the world that this family invites all people to come and taste and see that the Lord is good.

Let's stand on our rock, our cornerstone who is building this structure in His own image and may we reflect that image as we live as people who are no longer aliens and strangers but are fellow citizens with the saints.

Our citizenship is in heaven, but our work is here on planet earth until Christ comes back for us. Let's take this work to heart and move forward in the power of the Spirit being servants of the Most High God.