

One Body, by One Spirit (Ephesians 2:11-22 & Genesis 17:1-11)

24-Sep-2017

Ephesians chapter 2 from verse 11 is our passage this morning

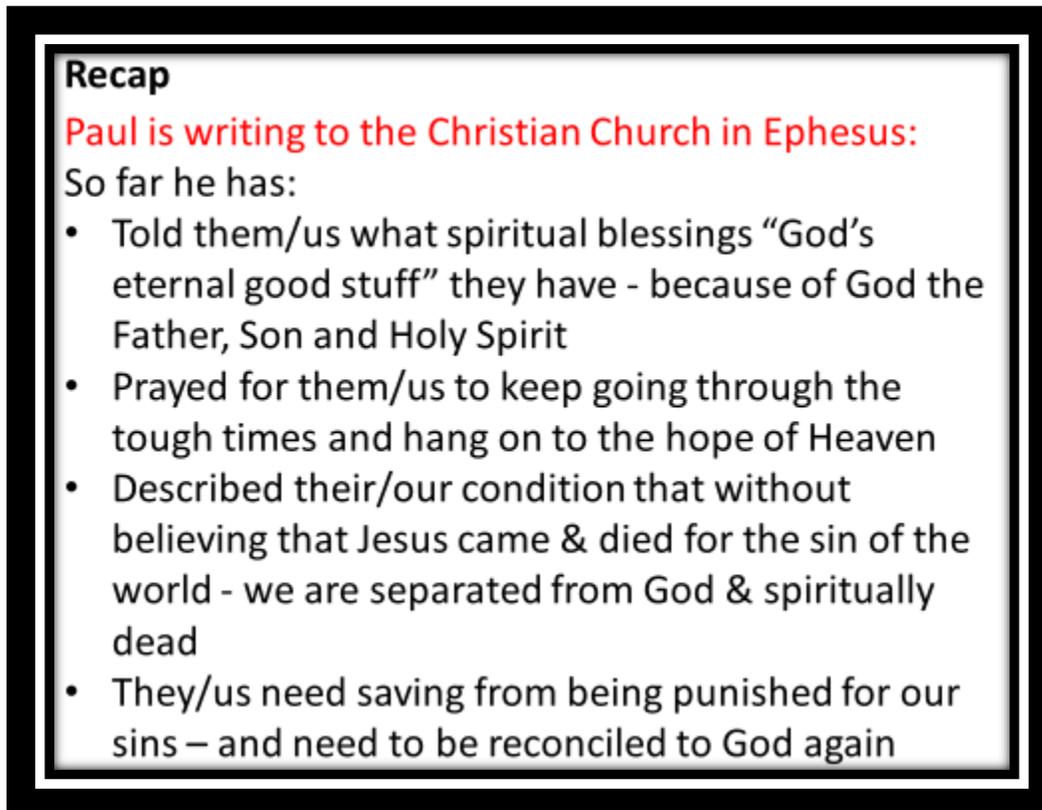
There's the usual outline to jot down notes

But let me pray for God's wisdom, guidance and understanding first

Recap

Let's do a quick recap before we look at this morning's passage

[Powerpoint 1-Recap 1]



Recap
Paul is writing to the Christian Church in Ephesus:
So far he has:

- Told them/us what spiritual blessings “God’s eternal good stuff” they have - because of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- Prayed for them/us to keep going through the tough times and hang on to the hope of Heaven
- Described their/our condition that without believing that Jesus came & died for the sin of the world - we are separated from God & spiritually dead
- They/us need saving from being punished for our sins – and need to be reconciled to God again

Then last week we concluded that:

[Powerpoint 2-Recap]

Recap

We are saved from being punished for our sins:

BY Grace – God’s undeserved favour on us

THROUGH Faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection

BOTH a gift from God

NOT by works – so we don’t boast

But

FOR Good works which God has prepared for us

Context

As we think about the context of this morning’s passage - let’s consider this first. When Julius Caesar invaded the south coast of Britain in 55 BC, he met great resistance from warring Celtic tribes. A century later, Roman control had extended as far north into what is now Scotland.

This Roman invasion took 30,000 Celtic lives, but the Roman victory was short-lived. Surviving Scottish clansmen soon began a fierce guerrilla type campaign against the Roman occupiers. So in AD 122, Emperor Hadrian ordered a wall to be built [it’s not just Donald Trump who has these ideas of building walls] - so Emperor Hadrian built a wall to separate the Romans from the Scottish barbarians to the north. Hadrian’s Wall still stands to this day. Some of you may have even seen it.

In Jesus' day, a barrier stronger than Hadrian's Wall stood between God's people - the Jews (the people of Israel) and the Gentiles (non-Jews) who were outside the Jews' spiritual community.

[Powerpoint 3-Context]

It was a barrier of ethnic prejudice.

So much so that the Hebrew word used for other nations - the Gentiles - *GOYIM* - was often said in a degrading and derogatory manner

Jews often referred to Gentiles as Gentile dogs!

Jews and Gentiles did not mix together, eat together or worship together

Yes - it's true God chose the people of Israel to be His people - and He even established a covenant (agreement with them) - God originally made that agreement/covenant with the OT patriarch - Abraham

God established and confirmed that covenant a few times in the book of Genesis

In Genesis chapters 12 and 15 - God promised Abraham a great name, a great nation, a great land and that ALL peoples of the earth would be blessed through Abraham

Then again in Genesis 17 - our OT reading this morning

In V4-6 - God said this:

⁴"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

So God's plan was to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham and his descendants ([Ge 12:1, 2, 3](#); [Is 51:2](#)) But instead of being a witness and a light to other nations, the nation of Israel - the Jews - developed a fierce prejudice towards the Gentiles - and made the worship of the God of the Jews - an exclusive secret squirrel club!

Prejudice and racism remain with us today, even in some churches. Such attitudes do great damage to our witness of Jesus' love for all people.

Jesus laid down His life to redeem people from every tribe and nation. We must not only accept them, we must love them as our brothers and sisters in Christ ([Gal. 3:28-29](#); [Rev. 5:9](#))

The Apostle Paul has been chosen by Jesus Himself to bring Jesus' message to the Gentiles - but it's not always easy for Paul - because of the prejudice and racial tendencies that exist between the Jews and Gentiles.

That's the cultural climate that Paul is writing to:

The Ephesians are a bunch of Gentile Christians

But as they now mix with Jewish Christians - how is it possible for the Gentile Christians to be accepted by the Jewish Christians.

Will the Jewish Christians expect the Gentile Christians to adopt all the Jewish cultures and traditions - things like circumcision (a sign given to Abraham in

Genesis 17) - and things like clean and unclean food and the various festivals the Jews kept - and what about the Law of Moses with all its oral rules added on to it?

Do Gentiles have to become Jews first - and then Christians?

And by the way - the Gentiles include us - we're Gentiles because we are non-Jews - so this passage has lots to say to us too.

Gentiles' condition without Jesus (vv11-12)

[Powerpoint 4a-Gentiles' condition without Jesus/uncircumcised]

Now we can look at Ephesians chapter 2

In verses 11 and 12 - Paul describes the condition of the Gentiles without Jesus

First because they are born Gentiles - they are **uncircumcised**

What Paul means by this - is that Jewish baby boys were circumcised 8 days after their birth (Gen 21:4) as a sign they were God's people and that God had made a covenant with them through Abraham

Whereas Gentiles didn't circumcise their baby boys

And Paul makes the point in v11 that circumcision is done by human hands - and it's a physical thing -

Paul's point is that physical things are not so important - it's spiritual things that matter - and God is more interested in our hearts being circumcised - here's how he puts it in Romans 2:28-29

²⁸ A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and **circumcision is circumcision of the heart**, by the Spirit, So Paul is saying - it's our hearts changed by the Holy Spirit to love God that show we are a Christian - not some physical sign - like circumcision done by human hands

[Powerpoint 4b-citizenship]

Next Paul describes Gentiles without Christ as being **excluded from citizenship** in Israel - Gentiles were not allowed citizenship of the state of Israel and not seen as God's "chosen people"

[PowerPoint 4c-covenant]

And they were **not part of [foreigners to] the covenant promises** that God made to Abraham - promises like the one we read in our OT passage this morning where God says to Abraham - that God promises to be Abraham's God and the God of Abraham's descendants

[Powerpoint 4d-without hope]

And Paul also says the Gentiles are **without hope** - because they don't share the promises and hope that the Jews had that the Messiah would come and save them. So instead Gentiles face death without any hope beyond death

[Powerpoint 4e-without God]

And they are **without God in the world**. What Paul means is they had no relationship with the one true God, the God of Israel. The Gentiles may have worshipped a whole heap of Greek or Roman gods - but not the one true God.

In one sense - the Gentiles did have God - because God shows kindness to all peoples of this earth by bringing rain and sunshine and providing food - but the Gentiles did not have the true knowledge of God that provides righteousness, peace and the joy of being saved from their sin

So that's the condition of the Gentiles without Jesus

Those are terrible words - to be 'without Jesus'

To be without Jesus means: without spiritual blessings, without light, without peace, without rest, without safety, without hope, without a prophet, priest and King

Charles Spurgeon puts it this way: *"Without Jesus! If this is the description of some of you; we need not talk about the fires of hell; let this be enough to startle you - that you are in such a desperate state as to be without Jesus!"*

Gentiles' condition through Jesus (vv13-18)

Praise God - that that condition of being without Jesus is able to be changed for the Gentiles and for us - through our Lord Jesus Himself

Paul now describes the Gentiles' condition through Jesus in verses 13 to 18

[Powerpoint 5a-once far off]

Frist the Gentiles who were **once far off** from God - are **brought near** to God - by Jesus' blood poured out on the cross

The only way to be brought to God the Father is through the Son

The point of Jesus' death on the cross is not to focus on the gore and blood - but to focus on **God's love** that He allowed Jesus to die for us - to fix our sin - and bring us back close to God again

[Powerpoint 5b-Peace]

Second, the Gentiles through Jesus have **peace**. Jesus hasn't just made peace between God and humans by removing sin - He has brought peace between Jews and Gentiles - He is their and our peace!

[Powerpoint 5c-Wall]

Third, the two groups, Jews and Gentiles are able to be **united as one group** - because of Jesus. The work of Jesus on the cross is the common ground of salvation for both Jew and Gentile. Therefore, there is no longer any dividing wall between Jew and Gentile - Jesus broke that wall down. It's a bit like when the Berlin Wall came down in November 1989 - which brought the West and East Germans together. Jesus brings Jews and Gentiles together.

In the actual temple in Jerusalem, there was a special area called the court of the Gentiles - an area which the Gentiles were allowed to walk in but there was a physical barrier - a wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles - and the Gentiles were not allowed to go beyond that wall - otherwise they were put to death!

At the time of writing this letter to the Ephesians - Paul was under house arrest in Rome, awaiting trial because he had been falsely accused by the Jews of taking a Gentile into the temple and taking him past that physical barrier dividing Jews and Gentiles

Paul is making the point that this physical barrier is gone because of Jesus
The common bond of lordship and faith of Jesus is greater than any previous divisions the Jews had.

There is a lesson here for us - that if our Lordship of Jesus is not greater than any differences we may have with others - differences like politics, traditions, race, wealth, education, language, geography - then we haven't fully understood what it means to be under the Lordship of Jesus

(pause)

[Powerpoint 5d-Flesh]

Fourth, Jesus has **set aside in His flesh - the law with its commands and regulations** in v15 - what does Paul mean by that - because on first reading - it seems like Paul's saying Jesus has done away with the commandments

No! The big bone of contention between Jews and Gentiles was the fact that the Gentiles did not keep the Law of Moses = God's law plus all the oral traditions and rules added on. But since Jesus came to fulfill the law on behalf of both the Jews and the Gentiles - and since he bore the penalty for everyone's failure to fully keep and obey God's law - people are reconciled with God - through Jesus work on the cross - getting rid of the bone of contention altogether - because ultimately no one can keep the Law without Jesus doing it for us!

[Powerpoint 5e-One Humanity]

Fifth the two groups - Jews and Gentiles - are made into **one humanity**. Early Christians called themselves the "third race" or a "new race". Early Christians

realized that they were not Jews, not Gentiles, but one new humanity - embracing all who believe in Jesus

Early Church Father and Bishop of Constantinople - John Chrysostom (349-407BC) puts it this way: *"It's not that Jesus has brought one group up to the level of the other, but that He has produced a greater group: 'as if a person melted down one statue of silver and another statue of lead - and the two together become a statue of gold'"*

[Powerpoint 5f-cross/peace, access, Spirit]

And Paul says this new "one humanity" can only be brought about - in v18 - **through the cross**. This unity didn't just happen it was a hard-fought accomplishment by Jesus

And with this "one humanity" in Jesus comes the **same peace** to both Jews and Gentiles - as they hear the message of Jesus preached

And they enjoy the **same access** to the Father - because they have the **same Spirit** - the One Spirit - living inside them - as does every believer in Jesus

One group does not have greater access to the Father than the other group

That's why as a church family of believers in Jesus - we share certain things in common - we are saved through the Cross of Jesus, we have the same peace with God and peace in our hearts knowing we are saved and going to Heaven - we enjoy the same access to the same Father - and we have the same Holy Spirit living inside each of us!

That's why we hit it off with each other - and with other fellow Christians

We are one body of people - with the one Spirit - living inside us!

Gentiles' condition in Jesus (vv19-22)

And so there are benefits for this condition of being one in Jesus

Paul describes them in verses 19 to 22

There was a tendency for Jewish Christians to see themselves as superior since they were the recipients of God's promise/covenant to Abraham

And there was a tendency for Gentile Christians to see themselves as inferior and second class citizens in God's Kingdom.

But that's not the case here

[Powerpoint 6a-fellow citizen]

Jesus died for Jews and Gentiles - he brought the two groups together as a new group - and in this new group - everyone is a **fellow citizen** with the same rights and privileges

It's like - when someone migrates to Australia and they take up Australian citizenship - they have the same rights as anyone born here - including access to Medicare, schooling and the ability to vote in elections

[Powerpoint 6b-household]

Paul is saying the Gentiles are fellow citizens of God's Kingdom along with the Jews. And they are not only full citizens but Paul says they are **full and equal members of God's household**. Basically it means - fellow Christians are **family!**

So we have lots of extra mums and dads and brothers and sisters and sons and daughters here in our church family - who we can love - and they can love us!

We celebrated that family yesterday in our family fun day - with an idea of showing that common bond and love we have in Jesus - to others in the community - so they might come and join us one day.

[Powerpoint 6c-foundation/Chief cornerstone]

And Paul also says the Gentiles and us are part of a church - not a building - but a body of Christian people throughout the world - who belong to a family of believers - like a universal church - **built on the foundations of the Apostles and Prophets** of the NT and their teaching about Jesus - and **built with Jesus as the chief cornerstone**. In building terms - the cornerstone was not only the first stone laid in a building but also the stone from which all other stones were measured and laid.

[Powerpoint 6d-Holy temple]

Not only that - but Paul says in v21 and v22 - this universal church building includes the Gentile Christians in Ephesus and the Gentile Christians in Toukley And we are like **living stones** attached to this universal spiritual church building - this Holy temple of God - because God's Holy Spirit lives inside every believer!

Application

Applying this passage to our lives then

[Powerpoint 7a-App1]

1. We need to understand our condition *without* Jesus
 - a. An alien/stranger to God's people
 - b. No connection or true knowledge of God

c. No basis for hope - no hope of Heaven

[Powerpoint 7a-App2]

2. We need to understand our condition *through* Jesus

- a. We are free from the burden of the law which we can't keep fully - but which Jesus can keep fully!
- b. We are joined together as one body in Jesus by His death on the cross!

[Powerpoint 7a-App3]

3. And we need to understand what we have become *in* Jesus

- a. Fellow citizens of God's kingdom and part of God's family
- b. We are the temple of the God's Holy Spirit

Conclusion

And it's this last point I want to finish up with

As Christians - Paul says - we are the temple of God's Holy Spirit

The apostle Paul gives this warning in 1 Cor 3:16-17:

¹⁶Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

So Paul is issuing a warning about how special we are to God- we have God's Holy Spirit living inside us and so we are God's temple - we are made in God's image - we should be doing everything we possibly can to look after God's temple

And Paul also says this in 1 Cor 6:18-20

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. Again a warning about how precious our bodies are - as temples of the Holy Spirit So Paul warns us about the harm done to our bodies by sexual sin.

That's very relevant in the current climate of the same sex marriage debate - Paul is saying any sexual sin (sex outside of marriage, adultery, homosexuality or pornography) - is sin against our own bodies - and doing this is offending God - because a) His Spirit lives inside us and b) because Jesus bought us back from the dead by dying on the cross - it was free for us - but pricey for Jesus - it cost Him His life. So Paul says we should honour God because Jesus laid down His life for us - and we should flee from any sexual sin.

To finish up then - something worth pondering over morning tea and this afternoon at home

When Jesus came to this Earth

He said He didn't come to do away with the Law and 10 commandments [this bone of contention between Jews/Gentiles)

He said He came to *fulfil* the Law and show how He is the only one able to obey all the commandments and rules because He is perfect. And to show why we need Him for our sins to be forgiven

But Jesus also summarized the 10 commandments into two

1 - Loving God

2- And loving each other

In our current climate - we keep hearing the YES campaigners say - *it's all about love*

The YES people are talking about loving each other

But they're missing the point that by disobeying God's rules - they are not loving God

So they only achieve one of Jesus' two summarised commands - they love each other - but they don't love God - because

Jesus says this in John 14:15

"If you love me, keep my commands"

So let's leave here this morning realizing we are one body of people in Jesus sharing One Spirit - and let's leave here listening to the Holy Spirit inside us and remembering that Jesus summarized the commandments - as loving God and loving others

Let's pray