

UNITY NOT UNIFORMITY Sunday School- December 9, 2012

Unifying Topic: ONE IN JESUS CHRIST

Lesson Text

- I. The Reality Of A Union In Christ (Ephesians 2:11-13)
- II. Peace In The Union With Christ (Ephesians 2:14-18)
- III. Christ As The Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22)

The Main Thought: In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. (Ephesians 2:21, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Adversaries sometimes search and long for ways to come together. What or who can bring the two sides together? The writer of Ephesians proclaims that it is in Christ that we, who are dead through our trespasses, are brought alive in Christ and that Jesus Christ is the One who breaks down all dividing walls and brings us together as one.

Lesson Aim: To help the learners understand Paul's explanation of oneness Jews and Gentiles share as members of Christ's family.

Life Aim: To promote Christian unity without compromising personal identity and /or experience.

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- 2:11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;
- 2:12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:
- 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.
- 2:14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;
- 2:15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;
- 2:16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:
- 2:17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.
- 2:18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.
- 2:19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;
- 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;
- 2:21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:
- 2:22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

HISTORY:

Paul is talking to the Gentiles whom **God has quickened** (meaning *brought to life; or raised from death to life*) **when they were dead in their trespasses** (meaning *fall, slip, blunder, wander away*) and sins (meaning *miss the mark*) (2:1). They habitually lived and **walked under the control of the world's ways** as they obeyed the prince of the power of the air (meaning *the devil*). The **prince of the power of the air** is the same spirit that still **operates in the children of disobedience** (meaning *those who will not respond to the truth of God*) (2:2). Paul tells them that **"all"** including the Jews have **lived in times past indulged in lusts of our flesh and of the mind** (meaning *gratifying the cravings of our lower nature; physical cravings; or natural appetites*). They were **by nature children worthy of wrath**. The only hope for men in this condition is to experience the grace of God in Christ (2:3). Paul paints two pictures for us – one **"before"** Christ (2:1-3) and one **"after"** (2:4-7). He then brings it all together (2:8-10) and tells us what the goal of this comparison is.

LESSON:

Ephesians 2:11-13 The Reality Of A Union In Christ

2:11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;—"Gentiles" (meaning *all people who are not born Jews*) were the uncircumcision (meaning *those not having the covenant mark in the flesh*). They experienced two types of alienation.

1. **Social**, resulting from the animosity that had existed between Jews and Gentiles for thousands of years. Jews considered Gentiles to be outcasts, objects of derision, and reproach.
2. **Spiritual**, because Gentiles as a people were cut off from God in 5 different ways:
 1. They were **"without Christ"**, the Messiah, having no Savior and Deliverer, and without divine purpose or destiny.

2. They were "*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel*." God's chosen people, the Jews, were a nation whose supreme King and Lord was God Himself, and from whose unique blessing and protection they benefitted.
3. Gentiles were "*strangers from the covenant of promise*", not able to partake of God's divine covenants in which He promised to give His people a land, a priesthood, a people, a nation, a kingdom, and a King—and to those who believe in Him, eternal life and heaven.
4. They had no hope because they had been given no divine promise.
5. They were "*without God in the world*." While Gentiles had many gods they did not recognize the true God because they did not want Him.

Paul is letting the Ephesians know, to remember in times past (*before you came to Christ; when they were Gentiles in the flesh; under the dominion of the flesh*) they were called uncircumcision by those who were circumcised, the Jews, in the flesh made by hands (*it is that physical cutting around and off a small piece of excess skin that covers the tip of the penis*). This will now contradict the circumcision of the heart in the Spirit.

2:12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:—Paul recalls to their remembrance that before their salvation...

1. "*they were without Christ*."
 - a. without rest (Matt.11:28)
 - b. without life (Jh.14:6)
 - c. without light (Jh.8:12)
 - d. without salvation (Acts 4:12)
 - e. without peace (Col.1:20)
2. "*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel*." They were friendless, estranged, and separated from Israel, and the theocracy of God's chosen people.
3. "*strangers from the covenants of promise*." They were homeless, not having any share in the messianic promises.
4. "*had no hope*." They had no aspirations for the present, and cherished no hope for the future. Being Christless, they had no faith, no hope, and no love.
5. "*without God in the world*." This is the same as being an atheist. They had many gods and lords but not the true God. They had no knowledge of God and no saving relationship with Him.

2:13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. This is a strong and glorious contrast. Now, their new position is in Christ Jesus; in union with Him as compared in past times of being without Christ. They were once far off (*alienated*) but are now brought near by the blood of Christ. We are made nigh by the blood of Christ; not by becoming proselyte (*a new convert to a religious faith*) of Judaism; not by the sincerity of our repentance, not by the strength of our faith, not by the depth of our devotion, not by the joy of our spiritual experience. A new relationship has been established in a new covenant sealed with the sacrificial blood of Christ, who suffered the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God (1Pt.3:18). God has done this through His Son, Christ Jesus. The reality of the matter is that Christ Jesus is the only union or bond of the Jews and Gentiles, by whom they are reconciled to God. And the blood of Jesus is the means that brought this union into being.

Ephesians 2:14-18 Peace In The Union With Christ

2:14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;—Christ by His death not only brought peace between Gentile believers and God, but also Gentile and Jew, who had been hateful enemies for centuries. This union has made both one in the same body of Christ, the church and has broken down the middle wall of partition. A new unity has been established where race and national distinctions disappear in Christ (Gal.3:28). The social, religious, and spiritual wall of partition has been broken down between each. ¹In the Temple, where the Jews worshipped God, there were different courts (sections). These were...

1. the Court of the Gentiles;
2. the Court of the Women;
3. the Court of the Israelites;

¹ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/eph-lbw.htm>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

4. the Court of the Priests;
5. the Most Holy Place.

Between the Court of the Gentiles and the rest of the Temple there was a wall. The Jews did not allow the Gentiles to pass this wall. There were warning signs on the wall. The message to the Gentiles was this: "*If you go past this sign, you will die!*" The wall that kept the Jews and Gentiles separated has been broken down by the death of Christ.

2:15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;— Jesus in His death "*nailed to the cross*" the law with its regulations which separated the Jews. Jesus fulfilled the law of commandments in His body on the cross. He brought all hostility to an end. "*By his death he ended the whole system of Jewish law that excluded the Gentiles. His purpose was to make peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new person from the two groups*" Eph. 2:15 NLT. There is no other way to accomplish this except by taking two separate and antagonistic groups and making one new man. His design was to unite the two sections of humanity to Himself so as to form one new man, thus producing peace. "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" Gal.3:28 NIV.

2:16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:— Previously there had been a state of alienation, estrangement, and enmity, but there has been a change of relations both Godward and manward. Christ has harmonized both divisions through the cross; man to God and man to man. Christ has destroyed and put to death the barrier between man and God at the cross.

2:17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. Jesus' main mission upon this earth was to reconcile man to God. He preached the Good News of the Gospel to all who would hear. Only the love of God can bring peace to mankind then, or now. The Gentiles were far away from God because they knew little or nothing about God. And the Jews were regarded as near because they already knew of Him through the Scriptures and worshiped Him in their religious ceremonies, but just as needy and just as dead in sin. Neither group could be saved by good works or sincerity. They needed to hear about the salvation available through Christ Jesus. Both are now free to come to God through Christ.

2:18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. We see the action of Father, Son {Word}, and Holy Ghost here. This is saying: For it is through **Christ** that we both (*Jew and Gentile*) have access (both have a *right to enter, admission, can come near*) by one **Spirit** (*the same Spirit*) to the **Father** (*able to address God as our Father*). All three persons of the Trinity share in the total work of salvation. No sinner has any right or worthiness in himself for access to God, but believers have been granted that right through faith in Christ's sacrificial death. Because of Christ we all have the same Spirit and we can come near to the Father.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Christ As The Cornerstone

2:19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;— Now in the light of all this, because all hostility and enmity are past, they are no more strangers (*sojourners*) dwelling nearby, foreigners (*without full rights and privileges of citizenship*). But they are fellowcitizens with the saints (*Christ's people, having been born into the family of God, the church*), and of the household of God (*fellowship enjoyed by members of God's family, the church*). The Gentiles were entitled to the same privileges as the Jews were, and were not to be regarded as outcasts and aliens. They now belonged to the same community and family.

2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;— Paul changes the figure of speech from a family to a spiritual temple in setting forth the unifying character of the church. A man must build upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, which is the foundation of Christ Himself and He Himself being the chief cornerstone. Any other cornerstone or any other foundation constructs some other kind of building, not God's building. People may follow their own thought structure or some man's profound philosophy or even their own life-style, but it is not God's building that they structure. In Christ and in Christ alone and upon the foundation laid by the apostles is God's building being structured. Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone holds the building together.

2:21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:—"In whom" here means Christ. "*All the building*" speaks of all of us in the whole church. "*Fifty framed together*" means "*to join together*" as a carpenter does the frame-work of a building. We are "*growing together into a holy temple in the Lord.*"

1. **The church is pictured as a building**—the union of various parts of a living being, where God adds new believers being constantly brought and fitted into the building as each day passes. The individual stones represent believers, both Jewish and Gentile. The Church has the growth of a living organism. Christ is the living stone upon which all others are built up as a spiritual house. The church has two dynamic challenges at this point.
 1. The church must grow. It must be bringing new stones (*believers*) and fitting them into the building of God. The church must be adding on to the building. Its structure is not yet finished.
 2. Every believer within the building is a part of the building and expected to be busy adding on to the building of the church. We are all to be bringing new stones and fitting them into the great building of God, the church.
2. **The church is pictured as a holy temple**, as the universal church. All believers are being structured for God's presence. However, each person is placed into the structure only by Christ. Since Christ has come, God does not dwell in a temple built of stones, but in the temple of His church (*His people*). It is holy in the sense of being sanctified in Christ for God's glory.

2:22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. "In whom" here means Christ.

3. **The church is pictured a habitation.** "*Ye also*" means the Gentiles or Ephesians are as much apart of God's spiritual temple as the Jews are, built in union with Him "*together for a habitation*" (*a dwelling place, a home*) of God through His Spirit. The Spirit dwells within the church to help believers. We see the Trinity at work again. The great objective is to provide a place of habitation into one building for God who by the Spirit dwells permanently in His holy temple.

SUMMARY:

²Paul wants the Ephesians to remember how far they have come as Gentiles, courtesy of Jesus Christ. Once strangers from the promises made to Israel and without God in the world, they can now draw near through the blood of Jesus. By His death on the cross Jesus abolished the law of commandments which separated Jews and Gentiles, and has reconciled them both to God in one body. The Gentiles can therefore be fellow-citizens and members of God's family; they are also part of that grand temple being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus as the cornerstone, in which they serve as a habitation of God in the Spirit (11-22).

APPLICATION:

God is building one universal church where Christ is the head and the cornerstone who holds the church together. To be as one we have to be in Christ responding to the power of the Holy Spirit.

² http://executableoutlines.com/ep/ep_02.htm
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>