

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 12

He Is Our Peace

July 21st, 2013

Ephesians 2:11-22

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Ephesians 2:11-22. My plan this morning is to walk you through this text slowly in its three component parts and then to spend some time at the end dealing with some important practical implications for us as a believing people. Hear then the Word of the Lord, beginning with verses 11-13:

Hearing And Comprehending The Text:

¹¹Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹²remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

As always when reading the Bible in chunks as we are inclined to do, we need to pay attention to words like “therefore” and whenever we see them we need to discover what they are there for. This “therefore” serves to indicate that all of what Paul is about to say about unity and fellowship in the church is based upon what he has just said about the Good News of what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation. Unity in the church, whatever else it is, is explicitly a Gospel unity. It is never unity at the expense of the Gospel, it is unity because of the Gospel and it is unity around the Gospel. Don’t miss that.

Secondly, the word “remember” and the facts that follow are a helpful reminder that in the Bible “thinking” determines behavior. The Bible operates under the conviction that if you think about the truths of who God is and who you were and what God has done in Christ to secure your salvation – IT WILL CHANGE HOW YOU LIVE. We are not inclined to believe that as 21st century North Americans. We are DOERS not thinkers in this time and culture but the Bible says that thinking matters. If you think about who God is and who you were and what he has done for you in Christ you will begin to feel and to act differently. You will treat others with mercy because you will recall that you received mercy. Reflection upon such truths speeds our transformation.

Thirdly I want you to notice that little phrase “made in the flesh by hands”. Here Paul is signalling that one of the very important transitions from Old Covenant to New is a transition from superficial and external markers to supernatural and internal markers. In the Old Covenant the people of God were marked off superficially – a mark was made on their bodies – and externally – literally on an extremity. But now, Paul says, deeper lines of demarcation and identification are being drawn. They are supernatural and they are internal. It is the new heart giving birth to the new life that marks the true New Covenant believer. In the Old Testament we knew them by their flesh, in the New Testament we shall know them by their fruits.

Fourthly here notice what Paul says in verse 12, “we were strangers to the covenants of promise”. God’s redemptive purposes have always been communicated and mediated through covenants. What we call “The Old Covenant” is actually several old covenants. There is an Adamic Covenant, a Noahic Covenant, an Abrahamic Covenant, a Mosaic Covenant and a Davidic Covenant. When we talk about “The New Covenant” we are talking about the climax and consummation of all of God’s promises with respect to redemption. So what we have in the Bible is this stream of redemptive promise and grace that starts off small and keeps getting bigger, better, and clearer before climaxing in Jesus Christ. Think about the first redemptive promise made way back in Genesis 3. God promised that an offspring of the woman would come and crush the offspring of the serpent. There is hope there and a promise of redemption but there is not a lot of content; not a lot of clarity there. With each progressive covenant the promise grows and gets bigger, better and clearer before finally climaxing in Jesus Christ. That’s the movement and Paul says to the Gentiles – “you were outside of that. You were lost, dead and

damned. You had no hope and you were godless in the world”. Hear that church. That isn’t just something they needed to remember, we need to hear that afresh. Understand that there has never been hope or salvation apart from the redemptive covenant of God. There is no salvation for those outside of the covenant and there never has been. This is the answer to the question: “What is the fate of the unevangelized?” The answer is: “The same as ever it was. Outside the covenant stream of God’s redemptive purpose all people are lost, godless and without hope in the world”. That’s why evangelism and mission is serious business.

Lastly here in verse 13, “but now in Christ...” There are some beautiful “buts” in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. Last Sunday we talked about the “but” in verse 4. You were dead in your trespasses and sins BUT GOD made us alive in Christ and now here Paul says: “You were dead, cut off and damned without hope and without God BUT NOW in Christ you have been brought near.” That’s how you tell the Good News, by starting with the Bad News of who we are apart from the grace of God. The Gospel is really good news when it is given in the context of who we are outside the covenant of grace.

Look now at the second unit of text beginning at verse 14:

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

In this middle section of the text Paul is giving the Gospel again with a specific eye to both the vertical and horizontal effects of the Gospel. Let me try and tease that out for you. What Paul is saying is that after Adam humanity is hopelessly divided and characterized by unbridled hostility towards God and one another. You notice that every time you read Genesis don’t you? One generation removed from the Garden of Eden people are murdering each other in jealous rage and things just keep getting worse and worse and worse until God actually has to use the flood to restrain the spread of human hostility and depravity. Things spiral out of control quick when people are apart from God. So here Paul is saying, in Adam humanity is divided; in Christ humanity is reunited. Just think about that for a second. In Genesis we watch the progressive balkanization of the human race culminating in the Tower of Babel. Before Babel we had one

common language but because of sin and rebellion against God, after Babel the languages are confused and people fracture into multiple groups and nations. Then in Acts 2 after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus we see the pouring out of the Holy Spirit which has the effect of allowing all people from everywhere to hear the Gospel in their own tongue at Pentecost. Pentecost is the opposite of Babel. Acts 2 is a sign that the effect of Genesis 11 is being reversed! That's why Paul refers to tongues as a sign to unbeliever in 1 Corinthians 14; he is saying that something new has happened in the redemptive purpose of God and therefore the hour is late and the time for repentance and reconciliation is at hand. In Adam we grow apart from God and each other, in Christ we are brought near, that truth lies at the very heart of the Christian Gospel.

Secondly we need to deal with that confusing statement in verse 15 about Jesus abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances. What does Paul mean by that? Because at first it sounds at odds with what Jesus said in Matthew 5:

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to **abolish** the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (Matthew 5:17. ESV)

Jesus says he is not abolishing the Law and the Prophets now Paul seems to be saying he did. This is actually one of those places where we need to be reminded that the Bible was not written in English. These are actually two different Greek words. Jesus says I have not come to *katalussai* the law and Paul says that he did in fact *katargehsas* the law. The first word means to destroy or throw down and the second means to cancel effect. Letting the Bible interpret the Bible then we understand Paul to mean that Jesus cancelled the effect of the law which was to divide Jews from Gentiles and to divide people from God. Think about that for a second, a lot of Old Testament ritual law had to do with how you might approach God. If you bring a bull or a lamb and you cut it just so and you sprinkle the blood just so then you may draw near to God. In Christ, that is FULFILLED. Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That is fulfilled, that is completed. A lot of the law was also meant to separate the Jews as a distinct people. Don't eat this kind of seafood and don't wear that type of clothing. Those sorts of rules tended to isolate you from your neighbours which, in the case of the Israelites was a very good thing, given the relative depravity of their neighbours. But now, Paul is saying, such divisions are obsolete. We remember that Jesus declared all foods clean, we remember that he ate and

drank with sinners. We remember that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out equally on Jews and Gentiles. Paul is saying that certain aspects of the law were completed in Christ and other aspects were cancelled in Christ specifically what has changed is the effect of hostility and division. NT scholar Peter O'Brian puts it this way:

“Christ has abolished the law as a divisive instrument separating humanity from God and Jews from Gentiles.”
(Peter O'Brian, Ephesians; p. 205.)

I know you want this to be simpler – I'm right there with you. We would like this to be as simple as either the Old Testament is good and you must still keep it, or the Old Testament is bad and you need not keep it. This is more complicated. What the Bible says is that parts of the Old Testament are fulfilled – we don't sacrifice lambs anymore, we trust in the lamb of God who was slain. Parts of the Old Testament are cancelled in effect – in Christ the law does not keep us distant from God nor separate from the nations. And parts of the law remain in effect and are in fact deepened by the teaching of Christ and the Apostles – we tend to refer to this as the universal moral law. Jesus certainly did not abolish the moral law in fact he tightened it a great deal. “You have heard it said do not commit adultery but I tell you anyone who looks at a woman with lust in his heart has committed adultery”. Jesus tightened the moral law, fulfilled the ceremonial and cancelled the divisive effect. That's not as simple as we might like but its not as complicated as we sometimes think.

Positively now in verses 15- 16 Paul says that Christ is the new Adam and all those in Christ, Jew or Gentile, are the new humanity. He uses creation language in the Greek just as he did earlier in the chapter. Here is the point. Paul is saying everyone in the universe now is either in Adam or in Christ. If you are in Adam you will share in his exile and be marked by the hostility that is natural to his line. If you are in Christ you will share in his glory and be marked by the peace that is natural to his line. All people near or far, as in Jew or Gentile can only be reconciled in the body – that is the life and death of – Jesus Christ. There is no other way to have peace with God or one another.

Lastly here notice Paul's Trinitarian Gospel.

¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (2:18. ESV)

I was teaching this to my kids at Family Devos just this past week; all Christian life and worship is to the Father, because of the Son with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel is Trinitarian or it is not the Christian Gospel.

Let's look at the third block now in Paul's presentation, starting at verse 19:

¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:11-22. ESV)

First of all here I want you to notice that "getting saved" involves becoming part of the new covenant community. You are saved from your sins and UNTO some new relationships. Conversion is individual but salvation is corporate. You don't have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You are citizen with the saints and member of the household of God. Believing and belonging are thus two sides of the same coin.

Occasionally you will hear someone say: "I believe in Jesus but I do not belong to any particular church and don't feel the need to. I don't see "membership" in the Bible." If you don't see membership in the Bible all that proves is that you haven't read the Bible. Membership is all over the Bible. The word Paul uses here to describe the new relationship of the believer is *oy-ki-oy* which is related to the word *oy-ki-a* which means household. I always remember that because it sounds like IKEA which is where you buy things for your household. The word *oy-ki-oy* literally means "members of the household"; so membership is in fact in the Bible. The two metaphors for belonging as a believer are being a citizen of a city and being a member of a household. That implies that whatever belonging means it involves privileges, provision, responsibilities, identity and accountability. Children in a home have chores, they have responsibilities, they are subject to discipline and they enjoy protection and provision. Citizens of a city pay taxes, they are subject to law and they enjoy the benefits and protections of government. Belonging as a believer is therefore likely to involve the same.

Secondly notice that the basis of our unity and the means of our maturity is the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the pattern of the Apostles. Paul uses a construction analogy as he has done also in his letter to the Corinthians. Jesus is the cornerstone – he is the centre and capstone of the entire edifice. The Apostles flesh out the foundation. What Paul is saying is that the definitive foundation for our identity, unity and growth as a church is the apostolic preaching of Jesus Christ. Now, why didn't he just say: "Our foundation is Jesus"? Why add in "the apostles and prophets"? Because Jesus is easily hijacked by fantasy, laziness and malevolence. This provision is to ward off idolatry. Idolatry is when we take who God has revealed himself to be and we twist, shade, eclipse and edit so that he is not nearly so transcendent and demanding. We domesticate God. We've been doing it for a very long time. The Bible safeguards against that by providing within its pages the authoritative interpretation. The preaching of the Apostles is the authoritative Gospel of Jesus Christ. If we are to be the church and if we are to grow as a church then we need to preach Jesus like the Apostles preached Jesus. They preached him as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophesy and they preached him as the perfect lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. They preached him as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the head over all creation and if we don't do the same we are not the church. There is a reason that our fathers in the Reformation said that the **FIRST MARK** of the true church is the right preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to all the Scriptures. If you don't preach Christ according to the whole Scripture, you are not the church and you will not grow.

You will not grow and also, Paul indicates in verse 21, you will not gather. Paul's metaphor here about the church growing up into a holy temple implies that as Christ is preached according to the Scriptures, the elect are gathered in, bricks are added such that the whole temple of God takes shape before our eyes. Preaching Christ according to the Apostles, according to the promise of Holy Scripture is not just how the church grows, it is also how the church gathers.

Lastly in verse 22 notice that God dwells in his temple now even though it is still growing. The verbs here are all present tenses meaning this is on-going building, growing, gathering and dwelling. We don't have to wait for eternity to experience the Presence of God. He dwells with his people even now by His Spirit. Thanks be to God.

Implications and Applications:

I want to conclude our time this morning by simply highlighting a few of the very important implications and applications of this text for us a believing church. If what Paul has just said is true, then:

1. Racism and nationalism have no place in the church

Paul has just said that God in Christ has created a new humanity and in doing so has destroyed the old divisions and hostilities, so for us to artificially preserve what God in the Gospel has destroyed is to work against God's redemptive purposes. The church of Jesus Christ should be the most racially and ethnically diverse gathering in this city.

2. Our primary loyalty is to Jesus Christ and secondarily to one another

Make no mistake, in the Gospel old categories are destroyed and new categories are created. Jesus did not pussy foot around on this one. He said:

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law....³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:34-36. ESV)

Jesus could not have been more clear on this and he practiced what he preached. In Mark's Gospel when his biological mother and siblings came to bring him back to Nazareth he said:

“Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:33-35. ESV)

Let me try and be as clear and as courageous as Jesus on this matter: if you are in Christ then the bond of fellowship you experience with the brother or sister in Christ in Africa – though he be of a different colour, though he be citizen of a different nation will often far surpass the bond of fellowship you feel with your biological brother if he be not in Christ. Is that clear? Let me apply this closer to home. Your obligation to your fellow member in this local body surpasses your obligation to the poor unbeliever of this city. I know that sounds wrong, but it is absolutely right. Sometimes Christians proudly speak of their devaluation of fellow Christians. They will

say: “I’m really all about the unbelieving poor. I don’t want to run shoulders with the saints I want to serve the poor and the lost and the least.” Wow that sounds so spiritual except that it is disobedient and ultimately ineffective. The Bible clearly says the priority in our love and obligation is due the Christian brother:

¹⁰So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and **especially to those who are of the household of faith.** (Galatians 6:10. ESV)

Where is the priority in that verse? On the household of faith. This doesn’t mean that we disregard the poor, not at all. Marriage offers a useful analogy. As a man I am called to love my God first, my wife second and my kids third. Does that mean I hate my kids? No, but I mustn’t love them more than my wife or my God or everything falls apart. Likewise as a Christian man I love my God first, my tribe second and my city third. The church has to be better in love than the city, else why would anyone leave the latter to join the former? The church is the city on the hill, the light that draws men out of darkness. It has to be better in here. They shall know we are his disciples by our love for one another.

3. Enmity is evidence of carnality

If its true that God in Christ has put to death ENMITY as it literally says in verse 16, then the presence of ENMITY within so called Christian people is proof of their carnality. In plain English; people inclined to enmity are not indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. That’s not my extreme opinion, that is both the logical implication of this text and the explicit teaching of Galatians 5.

¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, **enmity**, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21. ESV)

Now, this doesn’t mean that Christians don’t occasionally disagree and confront one another – Paul confronted Peter over an issue of Gospel significance, this can and does and should happen. But if a so-called Christian just can’t seem to get along, moves from church to church and from conflict to conflict, can’t forgive and is often disoriented by rage and bitterness there is no other conclusion save that such a man is not a true believer. A true believer is at peace with God and is therefore now and increasingly at peace with other Christians. Enmity is proof positive of carnality; ye shall know them by their fruits.

4. The church grows and gathers when Christ is preached in accordance with the Scriptures

When Christ is preached as the climax of God's redemptive purpose – in line with the promises of the Old Testament and the Apostolic preaching of the New Testament – the church will grow and gather. This is how we do, according to the Scriptures:

¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17. ESV)

Lastly:

5. Membership matters

Believing entails belonging. It is time to forswear this obsessive individualism and autonomy that has plagued the North American Evangelical church for over 100 years and to name it for what it is: unbiblical nonsense and rebellion. At no other time in history would a person have thought they could believe without belonging. At no other time would you have wanted to. And don't come to me after the service and say: "Well isn't that the mistake of Catholics, to confuse belonging with believing?" Listen I'm happy to credit the Catholics with all kinds of mistakes but this doesn't happen to be one of them. First of all Catholics know there is a difference between belonging and believing and secondly Protestants have likewise always understood that to believe is to belong. John Calvin, no great friend of the Catholics agreed with the statement preserved from the early church: "You cannot have God as your Father unless you have the church for your mother". There is no believing without belonging and there never has been! To believe is to belong; it is to WANT to belong. It is to want to serve, to help, to love, to give, to encourage, to be accountable, to be fed and to be led. Real believers WANT to belong and consider it a great privilege that they may do so. They do not despise any of the gifts of the Lord. The church is a gift – it is a grace of God! It is for your good and for His glory. It is part of our witness to the world and it is part of our glorious inheritance among the saints. We are citizens now of a great and coming kingdom. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

