

When Enemies Become Family!
Ephesians 2:11-13
Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Bethany Baptist Church
May 7, 2017

...pray...

Much of the Apostle Paul's ministry was defined by a simple equation: there are only *two kinds of people in the world!*

1. *What two people...? Young & old; rich & poor; black & white (red & blue!)?*
 - a. No...the *Apostle of Jesus & former Pharisee* tended to divide humanity along *cultural & religions lines: Jews & Gentiles.*
 - i. *Jews* were the descendants of *Abraham*, granted the *Promise Land*, entrusted with the *Law*, and promised the *Messiah*.
 - ii. The *Gentiles* were...*everyone else!*
 - b. The ancient *Jews despised* the *Gentiles!*
 - i. After all, God had *set Israel apart* from the nations – didn't that mark them as *superior?*
 - ii. Some *rabbis* taught that *Gentiles* were created as *fuel for hell*.
 - iii. *Jewish midwives* sometimes refused to help *Gentiles mothers*; who wants to help bring *another pagan* into the world?
 - iv. **Jonah** *ran* from God rather than *preach* God to *pagan Nineveh*.
 - c. *In all fairness*, the *Gentiles despised* the *Jews* right back.
 - i. *Israel* had been *kicked around* the ancient world for centuries – a *perpetually subjugated* nation. *Jews* had been *dispersed* across the ancient world, often as *slaves*. Yet always trying to *live aloof*.
 - ii. Instead of selecting from the *menu* of their *new neighbor's gods & beliefs*, the *Jews* stubbornly stuck to just one **ANE Deity**, w/ *all* His laws.
 - iii. The *Gentiles*, w/ their *smorgasborg of idols*, felt having only **one god** made you kind of an...*athiest*.

- d. Then, in the 1st century, as Jews & Gentiles *heard* about Jesus & *trusted* in him, both groups carried their *smelly old relationship baggage* into the *newly formed church*!
- i. The first Christians were *Jews* who turned to Jesus as their promised & long awaited *Messiah*!
 - ii. But **then** God saved *half-breed Samaritans* (mixed race & contaminated *religion* going back the early years of the *exiles*).
 - iii. Next, God saved ***full-blown Gentiles!***
 1. God sent *Philip* to preach to an *Ethiopian court-official*. The Gospel was on its way into *N. Africa!* (Acts 8)
 2. God sent *Peter* to preach to the *Roman centurion Cornelius* (Acts 10) and an entire household of *Gentiles* believed on Jesus!
 3. Jesus saved the *angry young Pharisee Saul* w/these words: "...[Saul] *is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the **Gentiles** & kings & the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake!*" ... So *Saul* became *Paul*, Apostle to the ***Gentiles!*** (Moe to come in Eph 3.)
 - iv. And as the Gospel *spread* across the *Roman Empire*, Gentiles began to follow the *Messiah of the Jews* & the *God of Jews* but *not always* the ancient ***traditions*** of the Jews...
 1. Questions about *ritual & diet & special religious days* had to be *debated & resolved & communicated*.
 2. So even ***inside*** the church, walls remained that *divided* Christians.

Let's continue our study of *Ephesians* this morning by opening God' Word to **Eph 2:11-22** (this morning's focus: vv.11-13).

Last Sunday we considered a *jugular gospel text* in **vv.1-10**: *you were all dead – but God made you alive!*

Do *not* draw a ***thick black line*** between **vv.1-10** & what we've *just read!*

Paul is making a *vital point* that is directly connected to *salvation*; one we still need to review *today...*

God's power to *turn individual sinners into saints* is "***THEREFORE***" (v.11) God's power to *turn enemies into family!*

God's power to save sinners is also the power to reconcile enemies. 2X

1. **Two people** (vv.11-12).
2. **One price** (v.13).

For Paul, the *former Pharisee*, retooled by grace as the *Apostle to the Gentiles*, some days there *seemed to be* only **two** kinds of people in the world: *Jew & Gentile!*

1. But Paul understood that *some differences* are really only *skin deep!* **Read v.11.**
 - a. Paul identified the most *ancient & conspicuous* difference between Jews & the rest of the world. One often used to *summarize* the **many** differences between the *Jews & every other people*: *circumcision*.
 - b. *Circumcision* was mandated by *God* to *Abraham* as a sign of the covenant God made w/ the *patriarch* & his promised offspring.
 - c. But to the Jews *circumcision* soon became a matter of national *pride*, even the basis for *insulting* the *outsider!*
 - d. So while the *Abrahamic Covenant* was (remains) a crucial initiative between *God & Abraham*, Paul was clear that the **ritual** of *circumcision* had taken on too much *divisive* significance.
 - a. In fact, Paul's tone (11) is *almost dismissive - contemptuous!*
 - b. (**Reread v.11**) - Circumcision is *no more* than an *outward act* performed by *human hands*.
 - c. What *really matters* is what God does to your **heart!**
 - d. In fact, no less a Jewish hero than Moses had declared to the Jews before they ever entered the Promised Land: "*the LORD your God will **circumcise your heart** & the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God w/**all your heart** & w/**all your soul**, so that you may live!*" (Dt 30:6).
 - Beloved, God always been in the business of *transforming hearts!*

2. Some differences are only *skin deep*, but some *really do matter!*
 - a. Even though both *Jews & Gentiles* are **saved** by *grace* alone through *faith* alone in *Jesus* alone, God's *choice of Israel* as a *privileged people* gave them some *spiritual advantages*. Thus the lost Gentiles lived under **five** very real *spiritual disadvantages* (all *tersely reviewed* in **v.12**):
 - i. The Gentiles were *separate from Christ*.
 1. Paul carefully says "*Christ*," the Gr. term for *Messiah*.
 2. I.e., the Gentile peoples had **no** *Messiah* – no promise of *God-given national deliverer & king*. Only the *Jews* did.
 - ii. The Gentiles were *alienated* from the *commonwealth of Israel*.
 1. God Himself had *set apart Israel* to be an example of *holiness & a nation of missionaries* – supposedly missionaries to the *Gentiles*.
 - iii. Gentiles were *strangers* to the *covenants of promise*.
 1. God enacted several *unconditional* covenants w/ *Israel: Abraham, Davidic, the New Covenants*; He didn't *initiate* anything liked these w/ the *Gentile nations*.
 2. Yet these *covenants* (still in effect) were crafted by God to bless not only *Abraham & David & Israel*, but *all the nations!* ...
 3. ... the *offspring of Abraham* will bless the nations; that offspring is *David's greater Son*; David's *great Son* is *Jesus* & thru faith in *Jesus* both believing *Jews & Gentiles* are included in the *New Covenant*, given a **new & faithful heart** – **new & faithful & eternal life!**

iv. Before salvation, Gentiles had *no hope*.

1. Add them up: *no promise of a Deliverer, outside God's people, no covenants from God = no hope!*
2. If you are *alienated* from the God who *designed* it all, *made* it all, *sustains* it all, & has *plans for it all*, where is your *hope...?*

v. Unbelieving Gentiles were *w/o God* in this world!

1. The Gr word is a $\alpha\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ \rightarrow "*atheist.*" It's *not* that they didn't believe in *any* god – in general the 1st century Gentiles had *lots of gods* (21st man is much the same!).
2. ...it's that the Gentiles ignored the *one true God* – the *God of the Bible...*
3. ...who reveals Himself (Rm 1&2) to every man thru *nature* & in his *conscience* & his *heart...* only to be *traded away* for *man-made, conscience-salving* substitutes!

- b. You know, having a *map* doesn't mean you won't *get* lost, but having a *map* is better than *not!* God gave the Jews a *map* (\rightarrow *guiding relationship*) that in His wisdom He *didn't* give to the *Gentiles!*

Paul challenged his mostly Gentile readers: *remember!?! You were spiritually dead & culturally crippled! God pulled you out of a really deep well!*

And that rescue operation cost God a lot!

3. Read v.13. “But now...” For the *second time* in **ch.2** the apostle points to a *soul-saving turning point!*

- a. Vv. 1 & 5 – you individuals were **dead** in your trespasses & sins...
- b. **V.4** – **but God**...made us **alive** together w/ Christ!
- c. Vv.11&12 – you Gentiles were formerly **separate** from Christ... **alienated**... **strangers**...w/o hope....w/o God!
- d. **V.13** – **But now** in Christ Jesus....
- e. You were *dead*...you were *far off*...but God is *mighty to save*, through the *blood of Christ!*

4. Jesus’ blood redeems & Jesus’ blood reconciles.

- a. *His blood* means *His death*. Paul is writing about the *death of Jesus* in the *place of sinners* in order to *pay for their sins*.
 - i. In **1:7** we read that *in [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.*
 - ii. Then, in **2:8&9** the Apostle made it very clear that *Jesus’ blood* saves you when you *trust* that *His death* is *enough* to secure your *forgiveness*.
 - iii. Elsewhere (2 Cor 5) Paul has written that God *reconciled to us Himself through Christ*. You were *far from God* but now because your sins are forgiven, God brings you *near*.
 - iv. **Brought near** – I can’t neglect to tell you that *Paul’s Gr verb* is in the *passive voice* → you can’t *bring yourself near*. Then *who does!?! God* – *rich in mercy, great in love, lavish in grace!*

- b. Yet Paul *also* has a mind a *second* kind of *reconciliation*!
- i. He write that Christ's blood brings the *far off*, now *near*
 - ii. In Jewish literature, the "*far off*" were the Gentiles – *far off from God*. Could we say (12) *w/o hope & w/o God*?
 - iii. ...and "*near*" pictured *near to God*, in reference to the *Jews*, w/ their *covenants & their temple*.
 - iv. But Paul was writing now to *born again Gentiles*: no longer *separated*, no longer *alienated*, no longer *strangers*, no longer *hopeless*, ... no longer *w/o God*...**read v.13.**
 - v. Here is a very brief, but very important & often repeated truth in Ephesians: by God's doing believing Jews & believing Gentiles & you & me are *in Christ Jesus*. We are all *in union w/ Christ*, and therefore we are *together*.
5. Jesus' blood *redeems & it reconciles & it reveals*.
- a. In **1:9** Paul wrote of the *mystery of God's will...purposed* in Christ. We will soon read (**3:6**) that *God's mystery* is that the Gentiles are a part of *God's plan - Christ's church*, along with believing *Jews*.
 - b. *Salvation* for Gentile & Jew is **not** in *Abraham (circumcision)*, it's by *faith in Jesus*; it's *not* by keeping the *Law*, but by *believing the Gospel*.
 - c. *Think carefully* - Jesus does not make a *Gentile* a *Jew*, He makes both Jew & Gentile *Christians*.
 - d. And God does *not* make the *Church, Israel*. Read the **1:22-23** – the Church has *her own identity*. (Yet *Israel* does *not* lose *her identity* or *her place* in God's *plans & promises*.)

God brings us *near* & brings us *together* in Christ Jesus.

Every member of this church claims to be *blood bought!*

2. Your sins are *forgiven* & you are *brought near* to God!
3. **And** ... you are *brought near* to every other Christian in the *room!*
4. *That's* what we've been *talking about...*!
5. Paul has just laid the groundwork to make **unity** a *big deal* in this *little book!*
6. The bottom line is that God *paid* for us, *placed* us all *in Christ*, and *put us here* (in His church) **together!**
7. **Together is good!**

...pray...

Are you *feeling together* this morning?

Do you need to pray for God's help to **come near** to someone in our church that you are **avoiding**?

...or...

Do you need to be **reconciled** to *God*? To *turn to Christ & trust in Him*?