

## EPHESIANS 2:13-18

### INTRODUCTION

Let me just remind you that in verses 11-13. Paul tells the Ephesian Christians that they are to remember what they once were. They were Gentiles and as a result they were not blessed with the privileges that the Jews enjoyed. They had no expectation of a Messiah they were not as far as they were concerned in the covenant that God made with Israel in the Old Testament as a result they were without hope and without Christ in our world.

But in reminding the Christians at Ephesus to remember their past Paul did so in order to magnify the grace of God in their life for now they are brought near to God through the blood of Christ. Once they were foreigners but now they are 'in Christ Jesus.' What is true of these Ephesian Christians was true of every true Christian here.

We were strangers to God, we were without hope and without Christ but God in Christ brought us near to God and he did this through the shedding of the blood of his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we can call God our father, now we are his children, now we are greatly privileged; all of this we need to remember so that the grace of God in our lives will be magnified and so that our lives will constantly be singing the praise of our God and our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Well just as the Ephesian believers were to remember their past Paul now exhorts them to remember who they are now.

### 1. REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE NOW (vs. 13-18).

We must remember that a chief concern of Paul's letter to the Ephesians is to speak to the church about spiritual blessings. Christian men and women today must also understand and realise just how rich we are in Christ. This section (verses 14-22) is devoted to driving home this point. What we have here is two pictures, which are easy to understand, but the concepts behind these pictures are mind stretching.

We are going to look at the first picture today as the Ephesians are to remember who they are the first thing they are to remember is that:

**a) They are One People (vs13-18).** - Notice the 'but now' in verse 13, Once these Ephesians were far from God outside his privileged covenant people but now they are brought near to God through Christ. As a result everything has now changed, they are now converted, they now have a new Master, a new Lord. But this reconciliation to God through Christ means that these believers at Ephesus are now at peace with God (v 14). But Paul says so much more here than the fact that the Lord has made us at peace with God for Paul says that He himself is our peace.

Now we understand this concept easily enough when we think of our separation from God on account of our sins and Christ taking those sins on himself and giving to us his righteousness so that in that sense he is our peace.

But Paul actually is thinking of more than just being at peace with God although that alone is mind stretching but he is saying to these Gentile Christians are now at peace with others. They are at peace horizontally with others as well as vertically with God. This is his main thought in this verse. He is our peace but he himself is also the peace of all true believers, which includes believing Jews as well as believing Gentiles.

In verse 14 Paul is thinking about the temple at Jerusalem.

It was a structure that emphasised the difference between Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles were allowed into the outer courtyard of the temple, called the court of the Gentiles but no further. They could admire the Jew's privileges from outside but they could not enter into them. A small wall

marked the limit. Warning notices were placed on it warning all Gentiles that they could go no further or they would face death. Jews ignored these notices for they did not apply to them they could go in and out of the inner courtyard freely without fear but not the Gentiles.

This partition clearly was saying that Jews are welcome beyond here but Gentiles are excluded. Well Paul now says that in Christ that wall no longer exists, the division between Jew and Gentile ended at the cross of Christ. Both Jew and Gentile are on the same footing all are now welcome, all are equal it is the Lord Jesus Christ who has made the difference. All the privileges that Jews had previously enjoyed are now available to Gentiles through Christ.

The two people are now one in Christ, the hostility that naturally existed between Jew and Gentile has been destroyed, and the barrier is now down.

How is this possible well Paul tells us in verse 15 how this happens? Now this verse might be a little difficult to understand so let me try to help us come to an understanding of it. The ceremonial law given to the Jews in the Old Testament declared certain things clean, while others were unclean. Certain foods were considered to be defiled, while others could be enjoyed. If you touched certain things for example a dead body you were considered ceremonially unclean.

To be made clean and acceptable again the Jew had to go through a complicated purifying process before they could take their place in society again. Certain days were declared holy days while other days were not special in any way. Then there were sacrifices and rituals and garments and processions and feast days and a whole host of other laws that needed to be observed all the time.

The Jew could not live one single day without thinking about it all. It was that ceremonial law that was the source of the hostility between Jew and Gentile.

The Jew considered the Gentile to be unclean whereas the Gentile considered the Jew to be arrogant. The Jew thought of himself as superior to those Gentile dogs as they were called whereas the Gentile saw the Jew as someone who believed himself to be superior. So this ceremonial law was the cause of great hostility, tension and bitterness between the Jews and the Gentiles.

But if it caused so much hostility why did God give it to the Jewish people in the first place. It was to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah. Everything in the ceremonial law was full of significance, it spoke in some way or another of the coming of the Saviour But when Christ came there was no longer any need for the ceremonial law. When he died on the cross all the previous sacrifices became obsolete.

When he rose again and eventually ascended into heaven, as our great high Priest there was no need for the Levitical priesthood to continue. Now that Jesus cleanses us by his blood and indwells us by his Holy Spirit, all the ceremonial business about defilement and purification is now redundant. There is simply no longer any place for it. It is fulfilled in Christ; it serves no further purpose it must now be discarded.

For by his death our Lord Jesus Christ has destroyed the cause of hostility between Jew and Gentile He has abolished in his flesh the enmity between himself and sinners and between Jew and Gentile. Salvation is granted to both Jew and Gentile not because of their national identity but on the basis of Christ's death and his atoning sacrifice for them. He has shed his blood for Jew and Gentile alike he has granted his righteousness to both Jews and to Gentiles.

Both the Jew and the Gentile are indwelt with the same Holy Spirit and their access into God's presence depends on the same priesthood of Christ. No barrier now divides them from each

other. It is the Lord Jesus who made peace between them. A new nation is now to be found on earth composed of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ whether they be Jewish or Gentiles. The old way of dividing people into the categories of Jew or Gentile is now out of date, it is now finished forever in Christ.

But there is still a division of the human race, but now it is not a division of Jew and Gentile but one of those who are members of this new people of God and those who are not. The division is between believers in Christ and unbelievers.

Paul hammers home this new unity, which is found in Christ, the Lord Jesus has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles and has woven them into one body and this is done through the cross (v 16). Both Jews and Gentiles are restored to fellowship with God in the same way. There is not one way for the Jew and one way for the Gentile both are reconciled to God through the cross. It is by the same sacrifice for sins that both are redeemed.

If this is the case then there is simply no reason whatsoever for them to remain separated from each other. The ceremonial law is dead and buried and so therefore is the ill will and antagonism which once kept the Jew and Gentile apart. So in Christ there is only one people, whether the person is a Jew or a Gentile does not matter, it is wrong to talk about the Jewish Christian and the Gentile Christian for in doing so we are making a distinction where one no longer exists.

The world is no longer divided between Jew and Gentile the world is now divided between saved and unsaved, believers in Jesus and unbelievers. Christ has put to death the hostility that once existed between Jews and Gentiles and he did that through the cross. To want to continue to resurrect a distinction, as some Christians want to do is to undermine the work of Christ on the cross.

In the very same way there is no such thing as ethnic churches, unless they are based on language, but you hear people talking about West Indian churches, which are made up of just West Indian people.

Or there are Black churches; Chinese churches etc, all these churches are dividing what Christ through his death has united. The church of Jesus Christ should be multicultural as far as it is possible; it should of course consider the different cultures within its midst and that will affect the way the church functions but the greatest witness to the world is when churches are truly united.

As I understand it there is a church in Israel called Grace Community Church which has in its membership Jews and Arabs now that is exactly what Christ has done he has torn down the partition he has made the two one.

Paul goes on in verse 17-18 to emphasise that there are not two different ways of salvation, one for the Jew and the other for the Gentile. Christ came to both people and preached the message of peace to both groups and both groups of people have the access to God in precisely the same manner.

When the Lord Jesus preached to the Jews he was preaching to those who were near (v 17). But when he preached to the Gentiles they were far away. Now we can understand what Paul means here by considering the nature of New Testament preaching. Jesus never visited Ephesus and the Ephesians never saw him in the flesh like the Jewish people did. Yet we read here that He preached there.

He did preach there; he did it through the preaching of Paul and those who came after him. The physical lips that announced the message were not those of the Lord Jesus who had preached in person to the Jews. But Paul's point is that where the gospel is preached faithfully then Christ is

speaking. This is why in the New Testament the Apostles were to be received as if they were receiving Christ himself and those who rejected their message were in fact rejecting Christ himself.

So we can say in a very real way that Christ preached in Ephesus he was personally addressing them in the gospel message that was preached by Paul and others. Christ has also preached in here in Wensleydale. This is what gives the message that is preached today its authority. Those who reject the message of the gospel are not rejecting me or any other preacher but they are in fact rejecting Christ the Son of God.

This brings great responsibility upon those of us to preach, we must do the work in the study so that we understand the message and are conveying the message of the bible correctly. We must seek and depend upon the work of the Holy Spirit and we will be accountable for our preaching. But ultimately we are all responsible for what we hear each Sunday and at other times too.

We should tremble this morning for Christ is preaching to us; are we going to spurn his word are we going to continue to be indifferent or are we going to submit to his word and obey it?

So Christ's message is not to be restricted to Jews or to Gentiles, it is not to be restricted to a certain age group or to people of a certain social sphere. The gospel is to be preached to everyone and when people repent and believe the gospel then they have access to the Father by the Spirit. So a believing 6-year-old child and a believing 82 year old that have come to faith in Christ have access to the same God by the same Spirit.

Both are to be accepted as children of God, both are part of this one people both are members of the true Israel of God. Therefore let us not separate what God has joined let us do all that we can to encourage the unity of God's people, let us be very careful that we do not have a division in our minds that somehow separates people on the basis of age race, colour or some other category.

Instead let us be a people who display our oneness in Christ and let us be a people who are praying for unity among God's people and in God's churches. Is there a stronger witness to the world than a demonstration of real unity within God's church?

Amen