

04.03.07 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

One New Man

Bible Readings = Eph. 2:11-22; Gal. 3:23-4:7

Introduction:

- (1) Last Sunday we gave attention to the opening part of Ephesians 2, where we saw an exposition of the lavish, rich, abundant, and overflowing mercy and love of God, by which we who were children of wrath are made to be the children of God and freed to walk in his ways.
- (2) This action of God has been to create a new entity in the world, by which he is bringing his blessing to the nations, and through which he is displaying the glory of his grace to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms. .
- (3) This new entity is indeed, new, and is inseparably linked with Christ. We have seen that all we have and are, and all we will ever be is in Christ.
 - a. This is set out from the very beginning of the letter (1:3, has been a feature of the whole of the introductory chapter e.g. the frequency of 'in', 'with', 'through' etc. in chapter 1
 - b. It is no less a feature of chapter 2 (see, for example, 2:5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, 22).
- (4) Very conscious that we are going through Ephesians at the rate of an express train!! Therefore not expounding every verse.

This week we consider the fact of the Church, which means we will be speaking about the miracle of God's action by which he creates this new entity, and how this family/body/temple is his dwelling place.

1. The Environment of the New Testament Congregations

(1) This part of Ephesians, more than any other, contains material that is very closely related to the world of the 1st Century, but *this does not mean that it is confined to the 1st century!* However, need to understand some of the background:

- The great division in view here is that between 'Circumcised' and 'Uncircumcised' i.e. between Jews by birth and heritage and the nations (Gentiles).
 - There were many things that separated these groups (e.g. different history, different understanding of God, the Law of Israel, Temple and Synagogue, dietary laws etc.) but the summary is 'circumcised' vs. 'uncircumcised'.
'Hypertext' for all the divisions that existed between these groups.
- While in various places and for a variety of reasons many Jews were 'Greek' in culture and manners, the division was deep and remained throughout the New Testament era. For their part the religious Jews despised the Gentiles. See quote in Stott, Ephesians, p. 91 from Barclay
 - 'The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentiles. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations he had made...It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between

them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death.’

- For their part, the Gentiles viewed the Jews with attitudes that ranged from curiosity, to perplexity to fierce persecution. Within Judaism, those who sought to soften the Gentile/Jewish divide (the Hellenizers) became the object of bitter hostility, which only added further the Gentile puzzlement.

§ At the same time some Gentiles recognised that the Old Testament Law and its morality linked with God Most High was superior to the morals and polytheistic worship that dominated Greco-Roman culture. These are ‘God fearers’ in the New Testament, but there was still another step before they could worship in synagogue or temple: they had to be circumcised, accept the Law of Moses (as interpreted by the scribes and Pharisees), and cut themselves off from their Gentile roots.

- Whatever the case, the barriers were long-standing, and, to human eyes, insuperable.
- The situation was the negation of the Jewish destiny as set out in the Abrahamic covenant: blessed to be a blessing to the nations.

(2) This social, cultural and religious barrier was no clearer than in the Temple worship in Jerusalem, where a barrier of diving wall separated off the court of the Gentiles from the rest. There the Gentiles (and those ritually unclean through contact with them, e.g. the tax collector in Luke 18), could stand ‘at a distance’. They could not gain access to the inner court, or the holy place (and certainly not the holy of holies!).

- This physical barrier consisted of a wall about 1.5 metres high, which had various inscriptions declaring the peril of crossing over, saying, in effect “Trespassers will be executed”. One inscription on a stone slab unearthed in 1871 says “No foreigner may enter within the barrier of the enclosure round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.” (See Stott p. 92, cf. Lincoln p. 141).
- For their part, the Jews did not participate in any pagan worship, and were regarded as oddities for so refraining! The world of the New Testament was entirely polytheistic, and local temples and gods there worshipped were well attended, and with people attending a variety of temples depending on the need (e.g. Asclepius for healing etc.)
 - In particular, at Ephesus stood the great temple of Artemis of the Ephesians. Pagan mother-goddess whose temple (the Artemision) was one of the great wonders of the ancient world.

§ Linked with the cult of Artemis was a widespread interest in astrology, divination, magic and such like. One reason why there is such an emphasis on the principalities and powers in Ephesians. See also the sermon on 15.10.06 *Christ the Conquering King* (on the website) especially the section about the gospel coming to the city of Ephesus in Acts 19.

(3) So the world was marked by this great division: Jew and Gentile, and this perhaps most obvious in the matter of worship.

2. *But now* (Eph. 2:13)

(1) Remember the 'But God' in Ephesians 2:4? This is paralleled by a 'but now' in this section! (Eph. 2:4 cf. 2:11, 12, 13... 'remember', 'formerly', 'were', 'at that time', 'but now')

- There is an entirely new situation in operation. We need to remind ourselves that this letter (like all the New Testament letters) is *written to a group of people who have already heard the gospel and who have been transformed by it!*
 - The theology is describing what has *already happened*, and what they *already had experienced*. This was a community of Jews and Gentiles worshipping together...already!! The theology of the letter is *explaining* the situation that Christ has *already* brought about through the Word he preached to them through Paul and others. They were already meeting as the Church.

(2) Note one phrase which is quite significant in the context: Ephesians 2:11 'the *so-called* circumcision'. This implies that there is really a circumcised group, and that they are **not** the Jews.

- Compare with Phil. 3:2-3; Col. 2:11.
 - Circumcision was the sign of the covenant with God's Old Testament people Israel. It was preparatory for a covenant yet to be established. It separated Israel off from the nations *for a time*, so that the nations would be *joined in* at the fullness of time. This act of joining the nations under the terms of the New Covenant has its own 'circumcision' i.e. in Christ (cut off for our sins, and our sins cut off from us...and a New Covenant community formed).
- Thus *the Church* is the circumcised group: spiritually. And all who belong to Christ belong to this new community in which all have been circumcised in him...so that there is *no longer* Jew nor Gentile.
 - We sometimes think of ourselves with 'adjectives'. E.g. 'born again' Christian (as distinct from...??); 'spirit baptised' Christian (as distinct from???); and, similarly 'Gentile' Christian or 'Jewish' Christian...
 - But in reality we are no longer Gentiles or Jews, but Christians: *one new man*.
 - This is what they had already experienced in their life together. They knew the reality of the 'new creation' 2 Cor. 5:17;
 - They were already experiencing life together as a *dwelling of God in the Spirit*, with the head giving gifts to each and to all, and with the whole community crying 'Father'. They were already built on the foundation of Christ ('having been built')
 - This has the idea not just of *substantiality* (e.g. in Jerusalem, cornerstone of the Temple approx. 12 metres long), but *alignment*.

(3) The 'one new man' is Christ, in whom all believers (Jew or Gentile) have been raised up and seated in the heavenly places.

- How can this be spoken of? Vine and branches; head and body (here and in 1 Cor. 12:13, for example); and here in Ephesians: temple and dwelling place;

household of the Father; later we hear of the Bride of Christ. All emphasise the inseparable nature of the union, and the intimate nature of the connection.

- But the point is that we have access to God the Father in the Spirit through the Son (Eph. 2:18). ‘Citizens’ (another term of Greco-Roman background)...who have access not simply to the justice of the Empire (not simply to appeal to Caesar), but *to the Father* himself.

(4) There were doubtless great advantages in being a Jew (see the negatives in 2:12 as applied to the Gentiles, and the ‘positive’ version of these things to describe the Jews); and compare with Rom. 3:1ff; 9:4ff., but the Jews (though ‘near’) still needed to have ‘peace’ proclaimed to them in Christ!

- See the ‘we too’ in Eph. 2:3, and Paul’s own experience of being ‘near’ as a Pharisee! (cf. Phil. 3:1ff.)
- *But now*, a new situation is in place...one family, one Father, one temple, one Spirit, one access, one grace, all in the One Christ.

3. How Christ Has Done It

(1) The key to what Christ has done is *reconciliation*: first with God and thus with one another (Eph. 13-17). We were in sore need of it (Eph. 2:1-3) even though we did not recognize that we were!

- This has been accomplished *in his own body*: on the cross he bore the bitter division of the people groups. He bore the anger and hostility in his body, i.e. the *enmity*.
 - In the situation of Jewish/Gentile division he bore the Law, consisting of the commandments and decrees which maintained exclusive Jewish identity...so that he might bring a new humanity to birth.
 - § But the ‘law’ as a principle, always separates. If there is enmity, strife and bitterness, there is some ‘law’ at work: the ‘ought’ of what the other person ‘ought’ to be!

(2) Christ himself is our peace (2:14); who has established peace (2:15) and also preaches peace (2:17).

- How? Here we compare Eph. 1:7ff.; 2 Cor. 5:16-19.

(3) Having forged, established, and preached his Peace, he is now (through the action of the Spirit, particularly in the Word) building his Temple (Eph. 2:20-22).

- We will see more of how this is happening in Eph. 3 & 4).
- However, *all is bound up with the Father*. Temple is the Father’s house; and it is a house of prayer for all nations (Matt. 21:13; Mk. 11:17; Lk. 19:46; compared with Is. 56:7)
- The declaration ‘peace to them far off, and to those who are near’ likewise comes from Isaiah. See Is. 57:14-21.