
The Unifying Design of Christ's Cross

Ephesians 2:11-22

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The Berlin Wall was one of the most tragic and most visible symbols of dividing people...



Its coming down is still one of the most evocative moments as a people were freed and a people were united...

God has moved through redemptive history to resolve two great separations:

The separation between God and the unbeliever because of sin (Ephesians 2:1-10).

The separation between Jew and Gentile because of the Law (Ephesians 2:11-22).

There are massive divisions within our nation today:

Political division driven by a growing divide in how we understand our nation...

Racial tension and division dividing people groups driven by social justice causes...

Social tension dividing people driven by deeply held opinions about the COVID pandemic...

There were many such divisions in the New Testament era:

Social divisions between people groups...

Economic divisions between the very poor and everyone else...

Spiritual divisions between Jews and Gentiles...

Just as our present divisions have spilled over into the church, they did so back then. Many if not most of the churches struggled with multiple divisions. Paul wrote often and clearly about our essential unity and our liberty. The church at Ephesus had many of these same issues. Our text now tackles the root of those issues head on.

Our Problem - Separated without God (v.11-12)

The first half of the chapter speaks of the personal plight of individuals. Now Paul turns to the corporate problem of the Gentiles as a people.

¹¹ Therefore 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— ¹² remember 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.

The Identification of the Subjects (v.11)

This verse places two ironic statements back to back.

God's evaluation is that we were Gentiles in the flesh. Paul is not primarily talking about the "body". Rather he is talking about who we were before we were converted. This is our natural, in the world identity.

The human expression is when the so-called "circumcised" called us Gentiles, "uncircumcised". But even the Jews were circumcised in their flesh, that is in their bodies, in the old world and in the old covenant.

Notice that in both, it is a matter of the physical. There are those who are Gentile in the flesh and those who are Jews in the flesh. Neither of them is spiritual. There is no inherent spirituality to being a Jew. Never was. At one time in the past, there was an advantage: but not ever was there salvation.

The Description of their Condition (v.12)

The text describes the sad condition of the Gentiles. It is largely characterized by the word, *separate*.

We were separated from the privileges of the Jews: Christ, citizenship and the covenants. These were the unique privileges of the Old Testament Jews. They were expecting the Messiah to come and be their deliverer and their king. They had a citizenship in a nation; that is, in the nation of Israel. They were the original recipients of the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic Covenants. They had a privileged place in redemptive history, which makes their rejection of Jesus even more onerous. But Gentiles had no place in those privileges.

We were separated from the presence of God: no hope, without God in the world.

While not enjoying the Jewish privileges was a problem, that is only a horizontal issue. We also then had no hope in and beyond this life. Why? Because we were without God in the world (possibly "age").

For the Gentiles it appeared hopeless. We had no ground to come to God at all. We were separate from the Jews and without God in the world. We are lost personally (v.1-3) and corporately (v.11-12). Jesus' death and resurrection provides a personal redemption (v.4-10) and it provides a corporate reconciliation (v.11-18).

This text is one of the foundations for our New Covenant theology. It shapes how we think about God's redemptive plan. Through Christ a radical change has taken place. The privilege of the Jews and the problem for the Gentiles is now shown to have always been essentially the same. It was and is now, not an ethnic, a national or even a Jewish issue. It always was and is now clearly shown to be a sin issue. All, Jew and Gentile, have sinned and come short of the standard of glorifying God in every facet of life. Spiritual privilege in the midst of sinful depravity only amplifies the problem and increases the guilt.

Provision - Brought near by Grace (v.13-18)

The solution to the terrible plight of the Gentiles rests in the person and work of the Messiah. Separation from Him is the essence of our plight and the hope of our salvation. But the Jew is also lost, dead in sin, and without God in the world because he is merely the *so-called* circumcision in the flesh.

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

God brings us both, Jew and Gentile, together into one body (v.14-15) and then reconciles us as one to Himself (v.16-18) as He is building a single, corporate entity (v.19-22).

Its Summation in God's Word (v.13)

Were far... brought near... by Jesus' sacrifice. The Gentiles were far off from the Jews. This is not talking about physical geography but rather spiritual reality. The Jew and Gentile were separated by the Old Covenant, the Mosaic or Sinaitic Law. It set a wall around about the Jew and a Gentile could only come in by embracing Judaism. To come into the Jewish privileges, the believing Gentile had to accept the Abrahamic Covenant by being circumcised and the Mosaic Covenant by keeping the Sabbath.

Yet now, the blood of Jesus brings us (Jew and Gentile) near to one another. How? Because the New Covenant is in His blood, that is to say, the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). Paul writes, "You have become near [aorist, passive indicative]." Therefore, it is something finished on our behalf in which we are passive receivers of it. Once again, the initiative is placed squarely in God's hands.

Though I am going to break these next 4 verses into two divisions for the sake of our discussion but keep them together in your thinking.

Its Unification of God's People (v.14-15)

Paul focuses on *the centrality of the person of Christ* in grace's work of *unification*. All that Jesus has done reconciles us to God. It also reconciles the two groups of people in the world. What distinguished the Jews from the Gentiles was the Law; what divided the Jews from the Gentiles was the enmity and hostility between them as a result of the Law. As a result there was division and hatred. So then:

Christ is our PEACE who makes peace...

Christ is our UNITY making one new man out of the old two...

The cross broke down the dividing barrier of the Law and thus the enmity between the two. The objective was to make the two into one new man (entity). The person and work of Christ was designed from the beginning to make this so. The Church as the Body of Christ is the culmination of the work of God.

The Law has been abolished [loosed, dissolved, released from, done away with] (versus Covenant Theology) and the Jew and Gentile are now and forever one entity in the Body of Christ (versus Dispensationalism). We are not still under the Law because in Christ it has been fulfilled and has served its temporary purpose. There are not two separate redemptive purposes of God in Israel and the Church. And there are not two redeemed people of God, Jews and Gentiles. There is one Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is one redemptive purpose and one redeemed people. All of the elect are in Christ, are a part of His Body and brought into the New Covenant. We are one. Praise our Redeemer and Ruler.

This unity only exists *in Christ*. It is vain and empty to talk about unity between Jew and Gentile outside of being a Christian. In fact, it is not possible to bring together all the divisions that exist in the world. True unity, true coming together can only happen when people from Jews and all different kinds of Gentiles are *in Christ*. There, and only there, can there be the resolution of all the divides us. We will talk about this more next week.

Its Reconciliation of God's People (v.16-18)

Paul now highlights the centrality of the power of the cross in grace's work of reconciliation.

¹⁶ ...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

The Work of the Cross (v.16)

God has brought about reconciliation by the cross in this one Body. All of those together who were to be reconciled to God were brought into the Body of Christ. Since we have all been reconciled to God we are reconciled to one another. There is therefore to be no hostility between Jew and Gentile in the church. This may not mean a lot for us today, but in the early church it was huge. I think it may become a large problem in the last years before the Lord's return with the great in-gathering of elect Jews in that time.

The Preaching of the Cross (v.17)

God then has proclaimed peace to those far away (Gentiles) and those near (Jews). This preaching is draw them both to God and to one another. We continue that preaching today. We proclaim that God has one and only one Redeemer and one and only one redemption. It is only through the cross. It is only through Christ. But it is for all, for Jews and for Gentiles.

The Effects of the Cross (v.18)

The effect is that we have access together by the Spirit to the Father. Remember that the Gentiles were barred from access to the places of Jewish worship. They could not enter the tabernacle nor the Temple. But now, we all have access to God. We do not have to come to a *place*, but we come through the Spirit to the Father directly. The door is open. Come on in.

So there you have it:

God has brought the Jew and Gentile together into one, new entity called His Body.

God did this by:

- Abolishing the Law that separated them;
- Making peace through the death of Christ;
- Indwelling them individually and corporately together.

Therefore, access to the Father for both Jew and Gentile is only and forever together, in one Body, by the Spirit.

Product - Fitted together by God (v.19-22)

This paragraph is so important for us to understand. It gives us the grid through which Paul understands the Old Testament. Since Jesus, the Messiah has come, has died and has reconciled us to God in one Body giving us access to the Father in the Spirit, then here are the New Covenant implications for all.

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

What in the Old Testament was a physical nation and a physical temple, has now become a spiritual nation (v.19) and a spiritual Temple (v.20-21) and the residence of God (v.22). God taught us what this meant by dwelling in the Temple of a nation. But these were the shadows of heavenly or spiritual realities that, now in this New Covenant Age, are being fully disclosed by the Spirit.

As a Holy Nation (v.19)

There are two important concepts for us here:

We are all in God's Kingdom. Along with all the saints we are citizens of the kingdom of God. All believers, Jew and Gentile then comprise a new nation, a new kingdom, a new people group. Believers are the new people of God.

We are all in God's household. This second analogy is that of family. We are all now a part of the family of God. All believers, Jew and Gentile, are born into this great family of God that God is the Father of.

This is how the New Testament church understood itself. Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, in writing to Gentiles in 1 Peter 2:9-10 makes the same point.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

As a Holy Temple (v.20-21)

The church is also the Temple of God. God is building up living stones now, fitting them together since the resurrection and Pentecost to a grow an age-long, people wide, spiritual Temple for kingdom service and worship

To Be Indwelled by God (v.22)

God not only indwells each living stone individually, but also indwells the church as a corporate entity. That is true of us gathered here in this location on this day; it is true of all living believers all over the world today; it is true of every believer ever.

This then is the language of the New Covenant and the church. We are God's nation, people, bride and temple. Not this building of metal, stone and brick; rather these people.

Reflect and Respond

So how do we flesh this out in terms of living? Isn't this a powerful motivation to seek to be reconciled with anyone in the church we are struggling with?

We must think carefully about erecting new, unbiblical walls that make the church an "us" and "them". I am not talking about doctrine. Truth always will unite, and error will always divide. I am talking about all sorts of secondary issues by which we distinguish ourselves and divide from others.

We need to do some serious work on our theological frameworks. We have to be willing and open to thinking outside of our favorite box. I find even among ourselves that we want to thoroughly Biblical unless it is something we don't like; then we hang on to our cherished ideas.

We must hold fast to truth in the midst of a generation who has little patience with truth.

We do not worship or serve God as isolated islands. We do so together, as one.

Let us be motivated to holiness by the understanding that God is raising us up together to be a holy temple in the Lord. We are together in the New Covenant what the Tabernacle and Temple were in the Old.