

“Unity in Christ”

June 9, 2024

Ephesians 2:11-22

I. Introduction

In Genesis 12 God called Abram, later called Abraham, to follow Him. In **Genesis 12:2-3** God said, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Even before the Messiah came, the Jews were to bless all peoples by being a witness for God. But they didn’t fulfill their calling from God to “*go make disciples.*” They preferred to condemn the Gentiles rather than to witness to them. Like the prophet Jonah, they didn’t want to share their gracious and loving God with anyone else. So, rather than walking with God and ministering to the nations in the name of the one, true God, Israel became like the lost nations around her with her own “*special God.*”

Since, as a whole, the Jews in Ephesus wanted nothing to do with Paul and his so-called Messiah, the church in Ephesus was made up largely of Gentiles. They knew that, beginning with Abraham, God had made a distinction between Jew and Gentile—the Jews wouldn’t let them forget it. For centuries, the “**circumcision**” (i.e., the Jews) had looked down on the “**uncircumcised**” (i.e., the Gentiles). But God had made a difference between Jews and Gentiles, not that the Jews might boast, but that they might be a blessing and a help to the Gentiles.

After writing about the eternal life and blessings they had received from Christ, Paul wanted the Ephesian Christians—especially the Gentile Christians—to remember their old situation—what they were before they knew Christ and were saved. And then he wanted them to see how things had improved. They had unity in Christ. Paul began by reminding Christians of what they were before they knew Christ.

II. Before Christ, they were alienated--separated—from God

A. Without Christ Before making Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior, Christians were alienated or separated from God. The best word that describes any lost person, including the Gentiles, is the word “*without.*” Paul said that, as unbelievers, they “**were separate from Christ,**” i.e., they were without Christ,

without a Messiah. The Gentiles had no hope of a messiah, no hope of a Savior or a Deliverer. Their history, their future had no purpose, no plan, no destiny. In particular, the Ephesians worshiped the goddess, Diana, and, before the coming of the Gospel, they knew nothing about Jesus Christ. Like every unsaved person, whether Jew or Gentile, they were without Christ and therefore were condemned. John 3:36 says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.”

B. Without citizenship Paul wrote that they were “excluded from citizenship.” They were without citizenship. Through Abraham, God had called the Jews and made them into a nation. He gave them His laws and His blessings. A Gentile could become part of the Jewish nation as a proselyte, but he was not born into that very special nation. He was only a 2nd class citizen. He never really belonged. The Gentiles didn’t have the right to go back to the Old Testament and take the promises which God made to Israel and adopt them for themselves. As Gentiles, they were without citizenship.

C. Without covenants Paul then wrote that they were “foreigners to the covenants.” The blessing of the Gentiles is included in God’s covenant with Abraham, but God didn’t make any covenants with the Gentile nations like He did with the Jews. They were without covenants or promises from God. The Gentiles were “aliens” and “foreigners” and the Jews never let them forget that either.

D. Without hope Israel was able to have hope in God’s promises. They knew that He was able and trustworthy to fulfill them—God’s faithfulness can be seen throughout their history. The fact that they often failed to hope in those promises was due to their own unfaithfulness and not God’s. On the other hand, the Gentiles had no promises from God, they were “without hope” for the present or the future.

The religions of the world have no hope. They cannot promise a resurrection. Most of them are somewhat hazy about what happens after death. To those without hope, this present life is all there is. From this viewpoint—this world view, if someone misses out on the fun here, then he is doubly hopeless. This is seen in sayings like: “*You only go around once, so grab all you can.*” “*He with the most toys wins.*”

E. Without God Finally, and most importantly, as unbelievers, they were “without God in the world.” The problem wasn’t that the Gentiles had no god, but that they did not have the one, true God. No matter how religious or moral they might have been, if they didn’t know Jesus Christ, they were without God. In **Galatians 4:8** Paul reminded the Galatian Christians that before they came to know the Lord, they “were slaves to those who by nature are not gods” and that without Christ they were without hope and without God,

Actually, many unbelievers were and are without God because they didn’t want Him. Unbelievers can know the true God but deliberately refuse to honor Him. **Turn to Romans 1:18-25.** Religious history isn’t a record of mankind starting with many gods and gradually discovering the one true God. Rather, it is a sad story of man knowing the truth about God and deliberately turning away from it! The first 11 chapters of Genesis, ending at the tower of Babel, give the story of the spiritual decline of mankind.

III. With Jesus Christ there is . . .

A. Unity between Jews and Gentiles After reviewing life before Jesus Christ, Paul considered the present—verse 13 says, “But now.” Now with Christ there is unity between Jews and Gentiles. “You who once were far away, i.e., Gentiles, have been brought near.” In Christ, the separation between Jew and Gentile was abolished. In Christ, every person, Jew or Gentile alike, is brought near to God “through the blood of Christ.” Through the blood of Christ there is unity between Jews and Gentiles.

Sin is the cause of all conflict and division, it is the enemy of all peace and harmony. Sin is basically selfishness and selfishness is divisive and disruptive. **Turn to James 4:1-3.** Peace comes only when self dies, and the only place where self really dies is at the cross of Christ. There “self” is replaced with something better. In **Galatians 2:20** Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

For those in Christ, the only identity that matters is their identity with Him. There is no Jewish or Gentile Christianity, black or white Christianity, male or female Christianity, or Baptist or Methodist or Lutheran Christianity. There is only Christianity. Our one Lord has only one church.

The greatest barrier to unity of Jew and Gentile was the ceremonial law, “the law with its commandments and regulations.” The feasts, sacrifices, offerings, laws of cleanliness and purification, and all other distinctive outward commandments that made Israel unique were destroyed by Christ. By fulfilling the demands of the Law in His righteous life, and by bearing the curse of the Law in His sacrificial death, Jesus removed the legal barrier that separated Jew from Gentile. Turn to Romans 10:11-13. Today there is no spiritual difference between Jew and Gentile—there is only unity between them.

The ceremonial law was abolished but God’s moral law can never change, it reflects His own holy nature. This is the law which is summarized in the Ten Commandments and which Paul wrote in Romans 2:15 is written on the hearts of all men. Jesus summarized God’s moral Law in John 13:34: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” These moral laws can never change. They also lead to the unity between Jew and Gentile.

B. Unity between God and believers Not only did the Gentiles need to be reconciled with the Jews, but more importantly Jews and Gentiles needed to be reconciled to God. Through Jesus’ blood, there is unity between God and all believers. This is the conclusion that the Apostles came to at the Conference in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15. Peter said that God “made no distinction between us (the Jews) and them (the Gentiles).” Later, he said, “We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (Acts 15:9,11). It wasn’t a question of a Gentile becoming a Jew to become a Christian, but the Jew admitting he was a sinner just like the Gentile. Turn to Romans 3:22-24. The same Law that separated Gentile and Jew also separated men and God. Christ bore the curse of the Law and now there can be unity between God and believers. When Christ died on the cross, He abolished every barrier between man and God and between man and his fellow man. The curtain that separated the holy of holies and the holy place in the temple in Jerusalem was the symbolic barrier between God and man. When Jesus died, Matthew 27:51 records that this wall, “the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”

Ephesians 2:14 says Jesus Christ “is our peace,” Ephesians 2:15 says He “made peace,” and Ephesians 2:17 says He “preached peace.” As the Judge, Jesus could have come to declare war on those who

have turned their backs on Him, but in His mercy and grace, Jesus came with the message of peace. Now Jew and Gentile are at peace with each other in Christ, and both have peace with God. **Turn to Rom. 5:1-2.**

As **Ephesians 2:18** says, **“Through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”** As Paul wrote earlier, the resources of the entire Trinity become ours the moment we receive Christ. Those who were at one time separated from one another and from God are through Christ united with God and each other. Because they have been filled with the Holy Spirit, they have both peace and access to the Father. Believers can now come to God as their own Father, knowing that He no longer judges or condemns them but only forgives and blesses them.

IV. Summary

Using 3 illustrations, Paul then summarized his discussion of the unity of believing Jews and Gentiles in the church. **First, believers are one nation.** All believers in Christ become fellow citizens of God’s kingdom, **“You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people”**—the believers from every age who have trusted God. As **Philippians 3:20** says, **“Our citizenship is in heaven.”** We—all Christians—are one nation—the kingdom of God.

Second, believers are of God’s household. Through faith in Jesus Christ, believers enter into God’s family, and God becomes their Father; they are **“members of God’s household.”** God’s kingdom has no strangers or aliens, no second-class citizens. God now treats us and sees us exactly as He sees and treats His Son—with infinite love. **Hebrews 2:11** says, **“Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”** We are all brothers and sisters in one family. We are equal, no matter what racial, national, or physical distinctions we may possess.

Finally, believers are one temple. In the past, God walked with His people (**Genesis 5:22**) or dwelt with them in the tabernacle or temple. Today, through His Spirit, God dwells in the church, the living temple of God. God does not dwell in man-made temples or church buildings; He dwells in the hearts of those who trust in Christ. In **1 Corinthians 6:19** we read, **“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?”**

The foundation for this living temple was laid by the Apostles and New Testament prophets through their teachings and writings. Jesus Christ is the Foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11) and the Chief Cornerstone. Just as the cornerstone binds the structure together—Jesus unites Jews and Gentiles, all believers, into one church. 1 Peter 2:5 says, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.” Like Peter, Paul said that the temple is still growing because believers are being continually added.

V. Conclusion

Thousands of years ago God chose Abraham and his descendants to bless the world by telling and showing others who God is. But, as we’ve seen, they failed in their task. Now it’s our turn. Jesus gave the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20 to all His disciples, not just the Apostles: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Do you share the Good News of eternal life with others? You are no longer at odds with God, but are you telling others how they can have your peace and hope? In 2 Corinthians 5:20 Paul said, “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” You may be the only Christian some nonbelievers see. You may live a good life, a Christian life, but you need to be ready to tell others about the hope you have for eternity. 1 Peter 3:15 says, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” Are you ready to give an answer? When you stand before God, are you going to hear the words from Matthew 25:21, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.”

Later in Ephesians 4:3 Paul wrote, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Are you making every effort to keep unity with fellow Christians or are you a source of conflict and argument?