

Expository sermon outline and notes:

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Ephesians 2:11-22 “God’s Plan of Reconciliation”

Intro. One of the most sought after things in this world is “peace on earth, good will toward men.” Even today, we are still looking for peace in the Middle East, and other parts of the world. Yet peace treaties have failed for centuries. From 1500 B.C. to 850 A.D. there were 8,500 peace treaties made, but all eventually failed. There are still dividing walls in our world. Religion is set against religion, and nation against nation. Right here at home we have ever deepening political and racial divisions. Peace has been much sought after, but peace has been difficult to acquire.

The theme of this passage of Ephesians is reconciliation. In v.16 Paul wrote, “that He might reconcile them both to God...” The word is in an intensified form, “to reconcile completely.” Paul has in mind a complete return to favor, harmony, and peace between two factions that were at enmity with one another. First, we all need to be reconciled to God. The Bible always pictures reconciliation, not as God being reconciled to man, but as man being reconciled to God. 2 Cor. 5:19 says, “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.” God’s not the one who moved. God is a God of love and yet we turned from that God of love. We became enemies to God, hostile to God by our sin. Not only is there a need for reconciliation between God and men, but there also is certainly a need for reconciliation between men. For example, Paul speaks of the separation of Jew and Gentile. This was a burning issue in Paul’s day. This does not seem very relevant today, but it is, for it illustrates an ongoing problem in humanity. Still today there are divisions among nations, families, and people. Christ can break down the dividing walls of mankind. He did it in the first century, and He can do it today. From this passage, we can find out how to reconcile those who are separated from each other.

I believe the starting place is for us to understand:

I. THE NEED OF RECONCILIATION

We need to be reconciled to God, and to one another. In v.11 Paul says to us, “Remember.” He asks us to remember what we were before we came to know Christ as Savior. Oh Christian, remember how it used to be before you were saved! Remember the condition of your life then. The remembrance of the past will make us more thankful for our present privileges.

Now Paul points out what most of his readers were physically. Most were uncircumcised Gentiles. That is what Jews contemptuously said of Gentiles. They were also called “unclean.” But while proudly calling themselves the Circumcision, the distinction was nothing more than an outward manual act performed on their bodies. What they were physically really didn’t matter. It’s not what you are physically that is really important, but what you are spiritually.

Notice in v.12 the spiritual condition of these Gentiles who are not yet believers in Jesus Christ. The word “separation” could summarize their spiritual condition. Sin is the great separator in this world. If you have never received Jesus as your Savior, here’s a description of what life outside of Jesus Christ is. This is your present reality. If you are a Christian, this is your past reality. First of all, they were:

A. Without Christ – “Christ” remember is the Greek form of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” Gentiles were not looking for the Messiah. Many did not even know about a promised Messiah, for the Messiah was primarily promised to the Jews.

If you were saved as an adult, you have a better understand of what life is like apart from Christ. I can hardly imagine life apart of Christ! Can you say Amen to that? I say with Paul, “To live is Christ.” Now that I know Jesus Christ as my Savior, Life without Jesus Christ becomes a puzzle with the main piece missing. Outside of Jesus Christ there is no meaning to life. What a terrible tragedy to be outside of Jesus.

We have a hymn in our hymnbook entitled, *Without Him* (#470). Listen to the words of the verses:

Without Him I could do nothing
Without Him I'd surely fail
Without Him I would be drifting
Like a ship without a sail

Without Him I would be dying
Without Him I'd be enslaved
Without Him life would be worthless
But with Jesus thank God I'm saved!

B. Without Citizenship – Paul says we were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.” “Commonwealth” is from *politeia*, citizenship; state. Citizenship has privileges. Citizenship in the nation of Israel had special privileges. It was to Israel as a chosen nation that God made Himself known to men and entered into relation with them. Apart from Jesus Christ you are without an eternal home. You only have an earthly citizenship. You are missing out on a heavenly, eternal citizenship.

C. Without the Covenants of Promise - “promise” is distinctively Messianic. God made many binding covenants with Abraham and his descendants, the Jews. For example, in Genesis 22:18 God promised, “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...” (KJV). God made promises to David. God made promises through His prophets, such as the promise through Jeremiah of a new covenant (Jer. 31).

When you and I are saved, we are saved because we claimed the promises of God. Do you have a promise of God that you lay hold of today? Romans 10:13 says, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (KJV). That’s a promise of God. Do you have that promise? Have you claimed a promise of God? What a blessing it is to claim the promises of God.

D. Without Hope - Hope is an expectation of a better future. The religions of their pagan life were powerless to help men face either life or death. They had little hope for a good life in this world. They had nothing to hope for beyond this world. In fact, many people felt that the best thing of all was not to be born. What an awful thing it is not to have any hope.

You can imagine how a person might feel as he or she walks into the doctor’s office and the doctor has diagnosed their condition. The doctor just shakes his head and says, “I’m sorry. There is nothing we can do. We’ve exhausted every medical means we have.” What a terrible thing to have no hope. If you die without Jesus, you have no hope of eternal life. But if you do

know Christ as Savior, you can have hope even when the doctor has given you no hope of recovery! The lost person looks to the future with a hopeless end. If you are saved, you look to the future with an endless hope.

E. Without God – “Without God” is from *atheoi*. It’s not that the Gentiles were atheists in the sense that they didn’t believe in a god or gods. In fact, in one of the Apostle Paul’s journeys he went to the city of Athens. As he preached to the people that day he had just walked down through their marketplace. They had idols to their gods on both sides of the streets. Everywhere you turned they had a statue to a god. In case they had missed one, they erected a statue to one they called “the unknown god.” They didn’t want to leave any out. But they were atheists in the sense that they were without the one true God, nor did they have any saving relationship with Him. Furthermore, they were practical atheists, living without the true God in their day to day life.

Isn’t it an awful thing to go through life without God? Just think if you had no God you could call on in prayer. Just think if there was no God who could come and meet the needs of your life. And folks, if you *live* without God, you will likely *die* without God. And if you die without God, you will spend eternity as you have lived, separated from God. Hell is a place that is far off from God. In hell a man can call on God for all eternity and he will never hear one answer from God. There will never be one overture from God; not one response from God.¹

Oh, how we need to be reconciled to God! But how can we be? How can we move from being in the sad condition of v.12, to what Paul says in v.13a, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near...” Well let’s look secondly at:

II. THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION

The work of reconciliation is essentially a work of God. Notice the passive voice in v.13, “brought near.” God did it. We did not bring ourselves to God. We do not win God’s favor with good works.

You know, in human relationships, when someone is upset at us for something we have done or said, we often will try to win their friendship back by doing something good for them. But that is not how we are reconciled to God.

Reconciliation is needed both in our relationship with God, and in our relationship with others. In vv.13-15 Paul focuses upon God’s work of reconciling Jew and Gentile, and in vv.16-18 he focuses upon God’s work of reconciling man to Himself. I shall deal first with how we can be reconciled to God, for that is the foundation for being reconciled to each other.

So notice first of all:

A. First We Must Be Reconciled to God by Jesus Christ - Notice in v.14 the intensive use of the pronoun “He Himself.” Christ not only makes peace by His death but He is in Himself the very substance and living source of it. Jesus is the only way to find peace with God. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus is the man of peace. He is our peace.

Notice what Jesus has done to make peace with God possible:

1. The Price of Peace – V.13 says we have been brought near to God “by the blood of Christ.” Then in v.16 Paul says that reconciliation comes “through the cross.” You see,

¹ Contrast “without God” to “Immanuel,” God with us.

the last of v.16 mentions “the enmity” between God and man that must be put to death. Sin is what separates us from God, and only the death of Christ on the cross could atone for our sin. The death of Jesus removes the offending sin from man’s heart and turns away the divine wrath. The cost of destroying the enmity was the blood of Christ. By fulfilling the demands of the law in His righteous life, and by bearing the curse of the law in His sacrificial death (Gal. 3:10-13), Jesus removed the enmity.

2. The Preaching of Peace – In v.17 Paul said, “And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.” “Preached” is better, “proclaimed the good news” (*euangelidzomai*). As the Judge, He could have come to declare war. But in His grace, He came with the message of peace.

Do you realize that God has “given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18)? We can also proclaim this piece that God has provided.

3. The Practice of Peace – Now that we have been reconciled to God, v.18 has become a reality in our relationship with God, “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” “access” is from *prosagoge*, which literally means “to lead to.” The word, access, there was a specialized word that was used in those days to describe an official in royal court whose job it was to escort people into the presence of the king. You didn’t just walk into see the king—this man gave you access. Remember only the High Priest had access to the Holy of Holies, and that only once each year. “Both” here refers to both Jews and Gentiles. The fact that all Jewish believers now have access to God is amazing enough. But God’s grace is more than amazing, for even Gentile believers have access to God! And on top of that, we not only have access to God once each year, but we have continual access to God! We are no longer separated from God.

My office is built in such a way that to have access to me you must first speak to the secretary. She also is the access person for phone calls. I do want to know that unless I am especially busy or in a meeting, you have full access to me.

B. Then, We Can Be Reconciled to Each Other - As already noted, there is tremendous division among people today. Who can reconcile us? What we see in our text:

1. God’s Purpose in Reconciliation – Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles that they too might be saved. They were chosen by the Lord God to be witnesses unto the nations of the world. Instead, they put up walls between themselves and Gentiles. They became proud of themselves; they became hostile toward all of the nations of the world. But God’s purpose will prevail. In v.14 Paul says that Jesus “has made both one.” He has made both Jew and Gentile into one new people of God. By the death of Christ the exclusiveness of the theocracy was abolished. It was this lesson that was so difficult for the Jews in the early church to understand. Then in vv.15b-16a Paul wrote, “so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body....” “New” is new in quality, not time. He has in mind a new kind of unified body. It is not that the Gentile becomes a Jew or vice versa. The idea is of the creation out of the two of something entirely new—a new humanity, a new people of God. The uniting of Jew and Gentile into one church was one of the great triumphs of the Gospel of grace.

How is the church doing in fulfilling God’s purpose? Folks, we are not doing very well in most churches. The church is too often like an exclusive club. Most churches are divided by race and to a large degree by generations. Furthermore, the church is divided into hundreds of denominations.

2. God's Plan in Reconciliation – In order for God to accomplish His plan, He needed to do something about what was separating Jew and Gentile. The first step is what we have already talked about. We must first be reconciled to God before we can be reconciled to each other. The union of the two hostile races is intimately bound up with, and indeed is based on, the larger concept of reconciliation to God. Notice what Paul says in the last of v.14 that He did:

a) He broke down the wall of separation – Likely there is an allusion to the wall in the Jerusalem temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the sanctuary proper. Any Gentile that crossed that wall would be put to death. In fact, it was this wall that the Jews thought Paul's Gentile friends crossed when the Jews arrested him in the temple and threatened to kill him (Acts 21:28-31). God actually broke down that wall in A. D. 70, when the Temple was destroyed by the Romans.

People are separated tonight by walls. All kinds of walls are built up between people. People are divided by religion, by race, and by region. You let a white man get saved; you let a black man get saved; you let a Korean man get saved; you let a Chinese get saved and they are all one in the Lord Jesus Christ. He's broken down the walls. Even within families walls can go up between people who are supposed to love each other. The only solution to the domestic problems and divisions that plague America is the Lord Jesus Christ. It's in Christ that the walls come tumbling down. He reconciles us to God; He reconciles us to one another.

In a more spiritual sense, the wall dividing Jew and Gentile was broken down when:

b) He abolished the Jewish laws – In v.15 Paul said, "having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances." The whole Mosaic economy separated Jew and Gentile. Even to enter a Gentile house made a Jew ceremonially unclean. Jewish dietary laws kept Jews and Gentiles from eating together. Do you remember how Paul rebuked Peter for withdrawing from eating with Gentiles? (Gal. 2:12). Thankfully, those laws have been abolished (*karargeo*), or rendered inoperative. They have been set aside, for those laws have accomplished their purpose.

Notice that Paul had in mind, not the moral law, but to "the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances...." "Ordinances" is *dogma*, decree, ordinance, decision, command. A similar idea is expressed in Col. 2:14, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." What is it that has divided the church into denominations and sects? It is our own denominational dogmas that we have developed over the years.

We should embrace the reconciling work of Jesus Christ especially as we consider last of all:

III. THE RESULT OF RECONCILIATION

Notice what Christ has accomplished through His reconciling work:

A. We Are a New Nation – Paul says in v.19, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints...." This "new nation" is the Church, "a chosen generation...a holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9). He says you are not a foreigner. You are a fellow citizen with the saints. In citizenship brings with it certain privileges that others do not have.

Furthermore, we are part of a:

B. We Are a New Family – In the last of v.19 Paul says we are also “members of the household of God.” God is my Father, and I have many brothers and sisters in Christ. Isn’t it wonderful to be God’s child? Aren’t you glad you are in the family of God? Isn’t it wonderful to be a child of God? Since we are part of the same spiritual family, there ought to be sweet fellowship between God’s people. We are all a part of the household of God.

C. We Have Become a New Temple of God – In the Old Testament, God dwelt in the tabernacle and the temple. When Jesus came God dwelt in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Today, through His Spirit, God dwells in the Church. We are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16). Notice how Paul describes the church in vv.20-22, “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” Where does God dwell today? It is not in some building that men have built. God dwells in the hearts of believers. And when we come together as a church, God dwells in our midst. But as soon as we leave this building, the special presence of God leaves with us!

Notice we are built upon the foundation of the apostles. That is, they did the foundational work. Jesus Christ is the corner stone. A foundation is important to the stability of a building. A church has a solid foundation. The church is built on Jesus Christ. He’s the foundation and He’s also the chief cornerstone. The cornerstone is that which keeps the whole building together. It keeps everything in line. The only way you can get into the building of Jesus Christ is to have a foundation experience. The apostles gave us the New Testament Scriptures. As long as we are true to the Word of God, we can be strong as individual believers, and as a church.

Conclusion: If you are not yet a believer, you have heard what your life is like apart from Jesus Christ. Don’t continue another day in such a state. You can be reconciled to God. You can become a part of a new family. The first step in being right with others is to be right with God. Come to Jesus. Trust in His shed blood that brings forgiveness of sin, and reconciliation to God.

If you are a believer, will you do your part to help bring about reconciliation between God and your fellow man? Will you help break down the man-made walls that separate believers? Will you help make this church one big happy family in Jesus?

Sources: Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Curtis Vaughan, *A Study Guide Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 5/3/92); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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