# Ephesians

Ephesians 2:11-22

## Introduction

Having laid out the process of salvation for us in verses 1-10 (‘By grace you have been saved through faith’) and our response (‘created in Christ Jesus for good works’), Paul returns to the big themes of this book. In these verses he lays out for us the wider purpose of the cross which was to create a whole new way of being the people of God.

In the Old Testament narrative, being the people of God was exclusive to Israel and those who aligned themselves with them by coming into the Mosaic covenant. However, the people of Israel were established to be a testimony in the world of the goodness of God so that in them ‘all the families of the earth might be blessed’.

Unfortunately, somewhere along the line, Israel assumed that this blessing was exclusively for them and built walls of hostility between themselves and the other nations which were exclusive. Thus, there were rules about who you could and couldn’t eat with etc,., which went beyond the Mosaic law.

Thus, we, as gentiles, were ‘excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world’ (v.12). But, through the cross, and through the blood of Jesus shed for us, God has broken down the barrier that separated us from the blessing of God. We are now included in the covenants, not on the basis of the Law, but on the basis of the cross.

There are not now two peoples of God, the Jews and Gentile believers, but one. Jesus prophesied this in John 10:16 when he said he would bring in other sheep ‘not of this pen’. His purpose was ‘to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace’ (v.15). There is now only one way to be saved: it is not through keeping the Law; it is not through sacrifice; it is not through anything else we can do but only through the cross through which we are reconciled to God in one new body. Through this means we ‘both have access to one Father by one Spirit’ (v.18).

Thus we are not strangers or foreigners anymore but ‘fellow citizens with God’s people and members of his household’. The apostles and prophets are our foundation. Christ is our cornerstone, and in him the whole building holds together and is a temple in which God dwells by His Spirit.

When an asylum seeker comes to this country and is accepted, they become a citizen of the UK. They were aliens, born somewhere else, in a different culture, language and possibly ethnicity. But, once they are accepted they become as much a citizen of the UK as those who are born here. In the same way, we sought asylum from the Father from the futile ways of this world and have been accepted. We are now citizens of the kingdom on an equal footing with every other citizen.

This is the amazing message of the New Covenant. We are the people of God, not by birth, nor by obedience to the Law, but by the amazing work that Jesus has completed on the cross. God’s purposes rest in his New Covenant people. That is not to say that God has given up on Israel completely –there will be an end time return of Jews to God. But, for the moment, the promises of God rest with the Church and it is through the Church – you and me - that God is working out his purposes in the world.

## Coming to Faith

Coming to faith is not something we can do in isolation. Coming to faith is becoming part of the people of God. You cannot live as a Christian and be disconnected from his church – it is a contradiction in terms. Salvation is as much a corporate action as an individual action. That is also why baptism is so important – when you are baptised, you are baptised into the Body of Christ. You become part of something bigger than yourself and part of the plan of God for the universe. Personal faith can only be lived out in conjunction with the body of Christ. God never called us to be hermits. It has to be lived out in relationship with others.

What other organisation is there in the world where people from all walks of life – different ethnicity, different economic backgrounds, and different intellectual abilities – are put in a pot, mixed up together and encouraged to love one another? It is not always easy being in the Body of Christ. But it is essential!

At One Event, Dave Gilpin was speaking about life in the body and the fact that it is only in the church where people get hurt and stay hurt. And yet this is the place where the grace we have received from God should be extended to others. There are actually no excuses for staying hurt in the body of Christ. We are instructed to love one another. We are told to forgive one another. We are even told to ‘bear with one another’ (that means put up with those who rub you up the wrong way or stand on your toes).

I might say ‘I wish everyone in the world was like me then we’d all get along’. The reality is we’d probably end up falling out with each other because I’m competitive, melancholic, moody and irritable.

If you are holding onto hurt today, no matter how justified, it is time to deal with it. “Well that’s easy for you to say, you haven’t been hurt like I have”. Yes and you don’t know how painful it is to be in church leadership being, at times, rejected, despised, gossiped about, ignored and dishonoured. Why do I keep on doing it? Because I love Jesus and I love his Church and I am not going to let Satan have a victory.

God his designed it thus so that, as we bump against each other we will knock the rough edges off each other. That is not always an easy process, but for all of us, it is a necessary process if we are to continue down the path to Christlikeness.

Any athlete or sports person knows that the body only gets fitter through being forced to go beyond where it already is. If you want your muscles to be bigger, you need to stretch them further and put more weight on them. If you want to run further, you need to increase your lung capacity through training. The adage ‘no pain, no gain’ is absolutely true when it comes to fitness. In the same way, we won’t grow as Christians without pain. Sometimes it will mean denying ourselves; sometimes it will mean forgiving or saying sorry; sometimes it will mean letting others ‘get away with it’. All of that is painful, but it is also part of the behaviour Jesus expects of us, and, like an athlete, the more we do it, the easier it becomes.

## Connection Points

In order to make our life in the body of Christ real, we need connection points. That is why we run homegroups in the church. We are not set up for one man ministry. What do I mean by that?

Many Pentecostal churches, and even more traditional churches, have a ‘pastor’ who is responsible for all the pastoral needs within the church. He visits the sick, prays with anyone who wants prayer and looks after the needs of all the people. The problem with this model of church is that, firstly, it is not Biblical (I could go into that in a lot more detail and justify it theologically with reference to the Greek, but I won’t bore you with that today), and secondly, it denies gifting within the body the opportunity to be expressed.

We will come to it in more detail when we get to chapter 4 of Ephesians, but in the body ‘Christ has appointed, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers’. In other words, there are a range of gifts that are available in every local body of people. If we just look to one man to fulfil all the ministry in the body of Christ, that man will become a cork in the bottle to prevent other ministries from arising.

For this reason, we are structured so that homegroups are the chief mechanism for connection and for pastoral care within the Body. In this way, those with pastoral gifting are given the opportunity to develop that gifting in a small group setting. It is also the place where other gifting can function. Do you have a gift of encouragement? Operate in it in your homegroup and see if others will not be encouraged. Do you have a burgeoning teaching gift? Look to exercise it in the small group setting. Is your gift hospitality? Invite the homegroup to meet in your home.

But what if you are not connected to a homegroup? Then get connected. We run a number of groups that can provide connection points in the church. There are the three established hoemgroups led by Jon & Nina, Rowland & Christine and Dave & Mare Miller and Angie. There is also the Friday group that operates as a gender restricted homegroup. There is the 18s-30s group that is an age restricted homegroup. There are opportunities to connect. We want to develop this structure further, but the first requirement is for everyone to connect.

I can’t make you join a homegroup but I do want to encourage you to do so, for your own sake and also for the sake of the Body of Christ. A number of years ago, we reorganised the homegroups because some of them had become untenable in terms of attendance or available leaders. We did the best we could to try and create balanced groups and, where possible, to have a range of gifted people in each group. Some took exception to our interference in homegroups; some didn;t like the group they were with; some just dropped out altogether.

Can I encourage you, if you stopped attending a group at that time, to reconnect? That way we can develop the groups further and perhaps multiply some more groups to increase the level of connectedness in the body.

## Unity

Paul concludes this chapter by telling us what the point of this body is. It is ‘to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit’ (v.22).

When Solomon dedicated the temple in 2 Chronicles 7:1, the glory of the Lord came down and filled the temple such that the priests could not stand to minister. This is the picture that Paul is drawing on here. He is saying that, just as the temple was constructed to be a dwelling place of God, so we, the Church are to be a corporate dwelling place of the Spirit of God.

When we come together to worship, the presence of God should fill this place. Wouldn’t it be fantastic if that happened one Sunday morning such that all the musicians put down their instruments because they could not stand to minister in the house of the Lord? Or that I could not stand up to preach because the glory of God was filling this place?

It may happen one day, but such things can only come about as God’s people dwell together in unity.

The enemy wants to get in amongst us and destroy our unity as a body. He wants to encourage us to let wounds fester, or to take our bat and ball home when things don’t please us. It is up to each one of us to not let that happen.

Psalm 133.