

Opening Words

God brought Israel near to him through the giving of his word, through the sacrificial system, through the prophets, and through the promises of the coming Savior. But this nearness of Israel to God implied something. It implied that the other nations were far from God

33 Eph What Christ did for the World 1

It is a dismal picture. Paul has been reviewing the sad state of the world in ancient times and which persists in many places today. We have seen that the gentiles were without Christ, antagonistic toward the people of God, without the covenants, without hope, and without God. And as bleak as this landscape is, Paul felt it necessary to remind everyone where they had come from. Among his first words in this new section of Ephesians beginning with verse 11 are the words, “Therefore remember!” Paul wanted his readers to remember where they had come from, and in remembering, they would be so grateful for all that Christ had done.

What a contrast between what they had grown up in and what they were now experiencing in Christ. Remember the spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ?

They were without Christ but now they were blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

They were excluded from Israel but now they had an inheritance.

They were strangers but now they were adopted into the family of God.

They had no hope but now their eyes were opening to the hope of his calling.

They were without God but now they belonged to God because he redeemed them.

Do you see how this letter fits together? And do you see what remembering can do? If we remember what life was like, we will be so much more grateful for what is now ours in Christ.

And why is this new life possible for us? It is possible because of what Paul describes in 2:13-16. Let's listen to Paul's words.

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (NIV)

The work of Christ has brought Jew and gentile together in one body. Think of it – for centuries, for over a thousand years, since the giving of the Law at Sinai there was a great gulf between Jew and gentile. There was that necessary separation that I talked about previously to protect Israel from the gentiles, to build up Israel so that it would be a light and a testimony to the gentile world. The

goal of the separation was that there would be unity for what God wanted was a worldwide family of all nations and races. But God first had to bring one nation to himself. The Old Testament speaks of the nearness of Israel to God and how far away the gentiles were.

Deuteronomy 4:7 – For what great nation is there that has a god **so near to it** as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?

Psalms 148:14 - And He has lifted up a horn for His people, Praise for all His godly ones; *Even* for the sons of Israel, **a people near to Him**. Praise the LORD!

God brought Israel near to him through the giving of his word, through the sacrificial system, through the prophets, and through the promises of the coming Savior. But this nearness of Israel to God implied something. It implied that the other nations were far from God. They did not have his word. They did not have his promises. They did not have his spokesmen. But God's desire at the right moment was to bring the nations near to him along with Israel to create this worldwide family. Paul says that God has done this through Jesus Christ.

Notice the centrality of Jesus Christ in the text.

- In Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near.
- Then he says you were brought near by the blood of Christ
- In 14 Paul says that Christ is our peace
- In 15 he says this new oneness of Jew and gentile is in Christ
- In 16 he says he did this through the cross.

Two jewels of Christ's work brilliantly shine in this passage. The first is his work on the cross. Verse 13 speaks of the blood of the cross and verse 16 speaks of the cross. Paul is viewing the death of Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. The Law that God gave Israel to separate Israel from the gentiles contained long lists of animal sacrifices to keep the nation near to God. But we know these sacrifices were only a foreshadowing of the great sacrificial death of Jesus when he took the sin of Jew and gentile upon himself and suffered the judgment of God on our behalf. Paul had referred to the cross already in this book. In 1:7 he said that we have redemption through his blood. Now in these verses we find the emphasis that we are brought near by the blood of the cross.

A second shining jewel of the work of Christ is his current work because he has risen, is enthroned, and has poured out the Spirit. In verse 13 he uses that choice phrase, "in Christ Jesus" pointing to the experiences and blessings that are ours in union with him. In verse 14 Paul says that Christ Himself is our peace. He doesn't say, only, that he **made** peace, although that is true – he **made** peace through the cross – but Paul emphasizes that **Christ now is** our peace. In 15-16 the cross enabled him to work now so that he could make the two groups one new man and reconcile them both in one body to God. Christ is now creating this new Man, this new humanity and Christ is now reconciling all into one body to his Father.

My friends – peace in the world only comes through Jesus Christ. It only comes by his death and it only comes by his current, active, present work in the hearts of people to bring those who were far (the gentiles) and those who were near (the Jews) together to his Father.

John Stott mentioned there were three imperialistic movements in the world. By an imperialistic movement, he meant those movements which seek to unite the world. The first movement he called the movement of philosophy where the wisdom of men attempt to resolve differences between races and nations. But this will never work.

The second movement is the movement of force. We have seen this throughout history where great leaders have tried to unite the world by force and some have succeeded to a degree. One only must think of Alexander the Great and the massive empire he forged from Greece to the borders of India and how he brought the Hellenistic culture to this part of the world. But his empire broke up and in the centuries after his death the Greeks would be swallowed up by the Roman empire. Then there was the Mongol empire which had the greatest land mass of all, Napoleon tried to forge an empire, Hitler, and others, but there is one similarity among them all. None succeeded. None brought unity to the world. None lasted.

There is a third imperialistic movement, and that is the movement of the kingdom of God which is quietly working its way in the world among nations, and people groups, and languages, and races. But the kingdom of God does not use force and it does not rely on the wisdom of men. Instead it relies on the power of God that works quietly in the hearts of people and families and communities and states and nations. It is a transformation from the inside out, and it is a transformation that will one day bring unity to the world. When Christ returns His quiet, hidden work will be revealed.

I think of the parables that Jesus taught. Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which is proverbially the smallest of seeds, but when the seed grows into a mustard plant it becomes the largest plant in the garden. Jesus said the kingdom of God, the reign of God is like yeast which is hidden in dough. You can't see it working but it is there and working. Eventually the entire lump of dough is permeated with the yeast.

This is Paul's vision. He uses a different vocabulary than Jesus, different illustrations, but he and Jesus are talking about the same thing. Jesus spoke of the mustard seed and the yeast. Paul spoke of a new man and a new body. The new man is the new human race. The old human race is in Adam and is corrupt, divided, at war, and dying. The new human race is in Christ Jesus and is holy, united, at peace, and growing. Yes, we have some distance to go with this, but God is at work making a new human race preparing it for a new creation. Paul also speaks of a new body. He says in verse 16 that Christ's goal is to reconcile Jew and gentile together in one body to God. His goal was not for there to be a Jewish spiritual body and a gentile spiritual body but one body in Himself.

Paul talked about this in chapter 1:9-10 when he said that God has revealed the mystery of his will and the mystery is that he is summing up everything under the headship of Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

Let me ask you, are you practicing oneness with your family, with your church, with your friends, with your co-workers? Christ shed his blood, Christ gave his life that he might bring oneness to a fractured world. The face of death is alienation. The face of salvation is reconciliation. May God give us grace to practice reconciliation with all people in all places for his glory.

Word of God, Speak! – Ephesians – Wonders of the Spiritual World
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In our next broadcast, we are going to see how this was such a struggle for the first Christians but how God used Peter and Paul to help achieve this. I hope you'll join us as we continue to explore the wonders of the spiritual world in the book of Ephesians.