

A Unified Body

Ephesians 2:11-12

INTRODUCTION

- A. Plutarch records that Skilurus, on his death-bed, about to leave 80 children, offered a bundle of darts to each of them, and asked them to break the darts.
 - 1. When they all refused, Scilurus drew the darts out one by one, and he easily broke them.
 - 2. Plutarch then adds that by so doing Skilurus was “teaching them that, if they held together, they would continue strong, but if they fell out and were divided, they would become weak.”
- B. In the church, unity is vitally important.
 - 1. Jesus prayed for that unity: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father as in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:20-21).
 - 2. Paul urged the Corinthians to be unified: “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).
- C. The Ephesians, in this morning’s passage, learn about the “Unity of the Body.”
 - 1. It appears that the church at Ephesus was made up almost exclusively of Gentiles.
 - a. Luke records Paul’s work in Ephesus like this: “He entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him” (Acts 19:8-9).
 - 1) Obviously some Jews were converted during Paul’s ministry at the synagogue in Ephesus, for Luke mentions “the disciples.”
 - 2) Yet, as with most places Paul visited, the Jewish synagogue quickly became antagonistic as Paul preached.
 - b. Further, we learn from Acts that many of those who converted to Christianity were practitioners of sorcery.
 - 1) “Many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:18-19).
 - 2) It’s quite different to think of Jews as sorcerers.
 - c. The riot in Ephesus arose because Demetrius, a silversmith who made shrines of Artemis, was concerned about losing money to Paul’s preaching (Acts 19:21ff). First-century Jews would not have been purchasing idols.
 - 2. That all is important, for, in this passage, Paul speaks about Jesus’ bringing Jews & Gentiles together into one UNIFIED BODY.
 - a. Quite frankly, we do not know why Paul felt the need to inform the Ephesians that both Jew & Gentile could alike come to Christ.
 - 1) From Acts 19, we know that some Jews were members of the church in Ephesus. Were these Jews causing the Gentiles to feel inferior?
 - 2) Were other congregations—made up mostly of Jews—causing these Gentile believers to feel inferior?
 - b. While the unknown historical situation could throw considerable light on this passage, our lack of knowledge of the circumstances does not change one iota the thrust of this text: Jew & Gentile alike can come to Christ & be united in one body.

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- D. Paul here speaks of “A UNIFIED BODY,” and this morning, we wish to hear these words.
1. We need this lesson as much as did the Ephesians.
 - a. It wasn't that long ago that you brethren from Council Gap began worshiping with us.
 - 1) Every congregation has its own “culture.”
 - a) You know precisely what I mean. No matter what congregation you enter, there's going to be a different “feel,” a different atmosphere & a different way of doing biblical things.
 - b) How do we merge the different cultures into one cohesive body of Christ?
 - 2) Every congregation has its own history.
 - a) Those of us who have worshiped at Alum Creek for a while have a set of experiences that have shaped who we are & the ties that bind us. Those of you who have come from Council Gap have a totally different set of experienced that have shaped who you are & the ties that bind you.
 - b) How do we move beyond that history—and the “we-and-you” language that goes with it—to shape one cohesive body of Christ?
 - b. No congregation ever remains the same.
 - 1) In the nearly nine years I've preached here, I've seen many new folk become faithful & active members of this congregation.
 - 2) Where do those new members fit in with a unified & cohesive body of Christ?
 2. In this morning's passage, Paul provides the basis for that unity. That basis is: A COMMON CURSE, A COMMON CONCILIATOR, & A COMMON CORNERSTONE.

A COMMON CHRIST, vv 11-12

- A. “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—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.”
- B. The Gentiles to whom Paul wrote shared A COMMON CURSE, all alike being under the same condemnation.
1. Notice that Paul lumps these Gentiles together in their penalty.
 - a. He simply says, “Remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh . . . were . . . separated from Christ.”
 - b. He doesn't say, “Some of you were really bad & stood condemned before God, but, you know, some of you were really quite good folks.”
 2. Do all of us not share A COMMON CURSE?
 - a. Did not all of us alike stand condemned before God? Is there a single one of us who wasn't really that bad before Jesus washed us in his blood?
 - b. I fear that all too often we categorize our sins on a scale from “Not That Bad” to “Really Horrible.”
 - 1) Maybe we haven't ourselves committed a sin that we consider “Really Horrible,” so we believe weren't that bad off without Jesus.
 - 2) Paul doesn't do that with these Ephesian Gentiles—Not a single one of them had hope or God in the world without Jesus.
 - c. We must understand that all of us—regardless of how “bad” we consider our sins—stood under A COMMON CURSE prior to Jesus.
 - 1) “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18). God doesn't reveal his wrath against your unrighteousness but not mine. He reveals his wrath “against **all** ungodliness & unrighteousness of men.”
 - 2) “All that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 Jn 2:16).

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John doesn't say that your desires are from the world, while mine are from the Father. Rather, he says that "***all*** that is in the world . . . is not from the Father."

- C. What is the COMMON CURSE we shared before Christ?
1. We were separated from Christ—we did not have fellowship with him, nor the blessings that fellowship involves.
 2. We were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise.
 - a. These Gentiles were not part of the promises God had made to his people because they were not numbered with God's people.
 - b. While God no longer has a covenant with the literal commonwealth of Israel, prior to our conversion we did not have the blessings that God gives to his people.
 3. We had no hope.
 - a. The world is largely a mass of humanity without hope.
 - 1) People are greatly worried about the economy or the war in Iraq or climate change or their marriage or their health.
 - 2) Much pop psychology is built around providing people hope in the midst of a hopeless world. Pop psychologists can help so many feel "better."
 - b. Regardless of how successful Dr. Phil & other gurus may be, without Jesus there cannot be true hope.
 - 1) If I receive a poor diagnosis in Morgantown tomorrow, Dr. Phil can't give me one ounce of hope. Can he promise that even if this body wastes away, he'll raise it incorruptible?
 - 2) If I lose my job, Dr. Phil can't give me one ounce of hope. Can he promise that since he feeds the sparrows, he'll feed me, too?
 - c. Without Jesus, there can be no hope when the bottom falls out from life. Without Jesus, there can be no hope of a future unpolluted by all the sin we see.
 4. We were without God in this world. We had no fellowship with God & the blessings stemming from that fellowship.
 5. Are you this morning under the COMMON CURSE?

A COMMON CONCILIATOR, vv 13-18

- A. "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 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, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."
- B. The rabbis of Paul's day used the contrast between those "far off" and those "near" to refer to non-Jews ("far off") & Jews ("near").
1. The point is that these men & women were once estranged from the company of the righteous, but they have now been brought into that company.
 2. They were brought near "by the blood of Christ."
 - a. Again, this is a common conciliation. All of these Gentiles were brought near by the same means: the blood of Christ.
 - b. There isn't a one of us who found forgiveness any other way.
 - 1) Some of us didn't find forgiveness through our own merit, while others found forgiveness through Jesus' blood.
 - 2) The only way to obtain forgiveness is through the blood of Jesus.
 - a) "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Rom 5:9).

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- b) “You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pt 1:18-19).
- C. Jesus also brought conciliation by breaking down the religious & social barriers that stood between us.
 - 1. Paul says that Jesus did this by breaking down “the dividing wall of hostility.”
 - a. At the edge of the outer courtyard at the Temple in Jerusalem stood the “dividing wall,” dividing the part of the Temple reserved solely for Jews.
 - 1) On that wall was an inscription that warned Gentiles that they could be killed if they ventured beyond it. The Jews took the “dividing wall” so seriously that the Romans allowed them to kill Greeks who went behind it.
 - 2) Interestingly, Paul writes this Epistle from a Roman prison.
 - a) Paul’s “crime”? He was falsely accused of taking Gentiles behind the “dividing wall.”
 - b) The Jews said, “Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place” (Acts 21:28).
 - b. Jesus, however, tore down the “dividing wall” by abolishing the Law that separated Jew from Gentile. Because that Law was annulled at Calvary, anyone can come to Christ.
 - 2. Each of us comes from different religious & social backgrounds.
 - a. Some of us once belonged to a denominational body, others of us were reared in the church, & still others of us had absolutely no religious background. When we come to Christ, those divisions don’t amount to a “hill of beans,” for we have Jesus, our COMMON CONCILIATOR.
 - b. We each have our own social backgrounds.
 - 1) Some of us are Republicans & some of us are Democrats & some of us don’t pledge allegiance to either party.
 - 2) Some of us have financial stability & some of us greatly struggle to keep afloat.
 - 3) Some of us are well educated & some of us aren’t.
 - 4) None of that matters in Christ, for he is our COMMON CONCILIATOR.

A COMMON CORNERSTONE, vv 19-22

- A. “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”
- B. Instead of being disjointed into different ethnic, religious, & social backgrounds, we are now part of the church of the living God.
 - 1. It’s interesting that in these few verses, Paul uses three different images to express the idea of the church.
 - a. The church is “the household of God”—an image that expresses the unity of the family.
 - b. The church is also a “structure.”
 - 1) Notice the use of the singular here—“the whole structure,” not structures.
 - 2) When you build a “whole structure,” you might use many different parts, but they all work together to erect that single building.
 - c. The church is also a “holy temple in the Lord.” There was only one Temple in Jerusalem.
 - 2. What unifies this family, structure, and temple? That structure is being “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”
 - a. As we have said before, “the apostles and prophets” form the foundation of the church in that it is their words upon which the church is built.

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- 1) This morning, we are studying from the words of the Apostle Paul; we have also referenced the words of Luke.
- 2) Of course, the words of Paul & Luke are not their own words—they are the words of God himself.
 - a) Jesus informed the apostles that they would teach the words of the Spirit: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (Jn 16:13).
 - b) Paul never claimed to speak his own words, but the words of God.
 - i. “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:37).
 - ii. “We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13).
- b. We are A UNIFIED BODY in that our foundation is “the apostles and prophets.”
 - 1) I don’t follow my opinions, while you follow yours. We follow the words of “the apostles and prophets.”
 - 2) I don’t follow one creed, while you follow another. We follow the words of “the apostles and prophets.”
3. Jesus Christ is our COMMON CORNERSTONE.
 - a. We seek to honor & follow his words.
 - 1) Honoring the words of Jesus is the only way to make it from this world to the next: “Everyone . . . who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Mt 5:24).
 - 2) Only the foolish fail to hear & respond to Jesus’ words.
 - b. I’m convinced that Jesus being our COMMON CORNERSTONE, however, means much more than that we simply honor his words.
 - 1) Our allegiance is to him & him alone.
 - a) “Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Lk 16:33).
 - b) “Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:38).
 - 2) As a body, our allegiance is strictly to Jesus.
 - a) I don’t have to have a certain preacher or elder or sit at the feet of a certain teacher, because I’m not following them—I’m following Jesus.
 - b) I don’t worry about that “hypocrite” sitting next to me—I’m concerned about how closely I’m following Jesus.
 - c) I don’t have time to notice if you’re paying attention in worship or not, because all of my energy is directed toward following Jesus.
- C. How closely are you following Jesus this morning?
 1. Do you need to come & begin clinging to him with your all?
 2. Do you need him to wash you in his blood because you remain under a curse?