**“ONE IN CHRIST”**

**Ephesians 2:11-22**

For the last few weeks we’ve been studying the Book of Ephesians which is a letter written by Paul to the saints of Ephesus. It is written to the church about the church. It’s heavy on theology and doctrine. There’s a lot in Ephesians for us to try and unpack. And so, we’ve been trying to do that. Thus far in our previous 3 lessons we’ve noted that WE, the redeemed, those of us who have been saved by faith, who have professed our belief in Jesus as Savior and Lord, WE are the church. The church is not a denomination or a building. The church is people. We, the church, have a purpose. We’ve been commissioned by our Lord to “Go… and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” So then, we are to make disciples, to reproduce ourselves in other people. Jesus promised us that He will be with us and He promised to empower us to carry out the task He’s given us. Both promises are fulfilled thru the indwelling Holy Spirit, GOD IN US!

In Ch 1 we saw that the church was God’s plan way back before the foundation of the world. God chose us individually to be a part of it. At some point in time you and I became a part of the church. When did that happen? When we were saved. We saw in Ch 1 that all three Persons of the Trinity were, are and will continue to be involved in our salvation. It was the Father’s plan. The Son carried it out thru His death on the cross. The HS convicted us of our sin and our need for a Savior and then once we exercised our faith and believed in Jesus, we were saved. The HS then seals us, He secures us until the day of redemption. Our part in the salvation process was to believe. In last week’s lesson we read, “For by grace you have been saved thru faith.” We saw that our salvation is by grace thru faith, God’s grace, our faith. And we also saw that both God’s grace and our faith are a gift from God. Paul explains that salvation is not our own doing. It’s a God thing. Our only boast is in God and what He has done for us. The last thing we noted at the end of last week’s lesson was that as the redeemed of the Lord, we are to bring glory to God. We are His masterpiece, His pride and joy. Paul says that we were “created in Christ Jesus for good works.” Just as Jesus did good works so we are to be like Jesus in our character.

Before we move on in our look at the church and who we are in Christ and what we as the church are to be like, I feel a need to clarify a point of discussion from last week’s lesson. If you’ll recall the question was raised – and it was a good question – “does everyone get the gift of faith?” If our faith is a gift of God, and Paul says that it is, then, does everyone get that gift? Well, to answer this question we need to understand where faith comes from. The Bible gives us the answer to this in Romans 10:17. Context of Romans Ch 10 – Paul is explaining to his audience how the message of the gospel, the message that leads to salvation is for all people but says that not all people will believe it. He says it’s our job as believers to teach and preach the good news of the gospel to those around us. And then in v 17 he says this: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing thru the word of Christ [the message about Christ, the gospel].” Faith is produced for that person who hears or reads the clear presentation of the gospel, ponders it, considers it, doesn’t just dismiss it or ignore it. I refer to such people as “seekers.” To these God gives the ability to exercise faith, to be able to leap into the arms of Jesus so to speak and trust Him to save them. They take Him at His word. They believe in Him.

So let’s pick up our study in Ch 2, v 11. READ Ephesians 2:11-22

Another amazing passage of scripture! This is a message about unity. It is a message for the church. Paul obvious thinks unity is important for us and the reason is that our Lord thought it was important. One of the things that Jesus prayed for us, His church in the high priestly prayer, John 17, was “that [we believers, disciples] may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.” Jesus felt that unity among believers was important and a vital part of our witness to the lost world. So, brothers and sisters, let me ask you, how have we done? Are we united? Is the church really and truly one? YES positionally. Practically speaking, not so much. There are a lot of factors that contribute to disunity in the church, among believers – name some.

In Paul’s day, in the church at Ephesus and in many of the churches Paul ministered to, the biggest source of disunity was this barrier that existed, this wall between the Jews and the Gentiles. [Give brief history – most early converts came from Judaism, Jerusalem Council of Acts 15]

In v 15-16 Paul addresses the social and spiritual alienation of the Gentiles by the Jews. [OT Israel developed a hatred for Gentiles, felt they were God’s chosen people and everyone else was God’s enemy and therefore was their enemy] But that was never the way God viewed it. Go back to the Abrahamic covenant, Gen 12:2-3: “And I will make of you [Abram] a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God’s desire was to bless all people of the world thru His covenant nation, ultimately thru His promised Messiah. This great nation later became known as Israel. Did you realize that God always had Gentile salvation in His heart? In Isa. 57 God expresses how He wants to spiritually heal all will turn to Him – “Peace, peace to the far and the near,” says the Lord. In OT language “the far” refers to Gentile nations and “the near” speaks of Israel. In his sermon right after Pentecost, Peter reinforces this idea when he says to a primarily Jewish audience in Jerusalem: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” God’s desire is for all nations to be saved and that was always His plan. Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations (Isa 42, Isa 60).

Unfortunately, extreme prejudice by God’s people kept them from reaching out to the Gentiles. A wall of separation existed between Jews, “the circumcision,” and Gentiles, “the uncircumcision.” V 11 speaks about a social alienation that existed and Paul uses the Jewish rite of circumcision as his example of one of many practices which identified God’s people Israel, which made them different than the other nations.

But not only was there a social alienation, there was also a spiritual alienation. That’s what V 12 focuses on. Paul says that you and I, we Gentiles, were “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.” We had no Savior, no Messiah to deliver us, no national blessings, no protection from God’s wrath, no promises for the future, no eternal life, no hope and without God. The Gentile nations worshipped many (little g) gods, but they did not know and worship the one True and Living God, Yahweh. So here Paul paints a pretty bleak picture of the Gentile condition before Christ. But that’s all in the past.

V 13 begins, “But now in Christ Jesus…” something’s changed. There’s good news for us Gentiles! We who were “afar off,” we Gentiles, were brought near to God by the blood of Christ, thru Jesus’ death on the cross. What is it that separates a person from God? What is it that hinders our ability to have fellowship with God? The sin problem. Jesus’ death on the cross removed sin. He cleansed us. He forgave us. And this provided the way for sinners like us to have a relationship with holy God.

V 14, His death also removed the barriers, “the dividing wall of hostility.” This harkens back to the Temple in the OT. There were some Gentile proselytes who followed the God of Israel and they were allowed to worship Him in the Temple. But they had to remain in what was called the outer court or the Court of the Gentiles. Between this outer court and the inner court of the Jews was a physical barrier. Jesus removed this barrier for us Gentiles. We who were once in the outer court, far off, can now in a spiritual sense move into the inner court, nearer to God.

We humans all have certain physical and national identities that make us different – male and female, Americans, Caucasian, Hispanic, black, Asian, Republican, Democrat, even our various family identities and ancestral ties. That’s all well and good. It’s OK to be proud of your heritage. But in Christ we lose all those human identities – we are one in Christ, one body, the church.

V 15 carries this a step further addressing the Jews and their practices. Jesus abolished the requirements of the Law, religious ordinances, traditions, ceremonies, all the Jewish practices. The Sabbath ended. Judaism ended.

V 16 Paul says that Christ Jesus reconciled us both (Jews and Gentiles) to God in one body (the church) thru the cross (by what Jesus did) thereby killing the hostility. We now have peace with God. We are no longer His enemy. All because of our faith in Christ and what He accomplished. V 14 says, Jesus is our peace. Do you remember our study a month or so ago about what “reconciliation” means? Re-establishing a right relationship with God and I referenced these verses here in Eph Ch 2

V 17-18 What Jesus did for us – for both us Gentiles and the Jews he preached peace. Both groups have access to God by the same HS. Peter recognized this with his experience in Acts 10 and 11. He could see when the HS fell on the Gentiles that God had broken down the barriers and there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile. [comment about my Messianic Jewish friends]

In v 19-22 Paul uses three metaphors to show how we are all one in Christ. #1 – “no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints” We are not outcasts standing on the outside looking in.

#2 – “members of the household of God.” We are all part of God’s family. The same family. In Eph 3 Paul prays to God the Father “from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” We have the family name! We are Christians.

#3 – “a holy temple in the Lord.” Paul’s picture here is that the foundation, the doctrine, was laid, was poured by the apostles and the prophets. Jesus Himself is the cornerstone. Then all the building blocks that make up this temple, that’s us! Paul says that we are being joined together. The Greek word used here means to fit snug. You and I are the living stones of a holy temple to God perfectly joined together and growing together. And in this dynamic holy temple that we form, God Himself dwells. That is who we are!

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.” (Rom 10:12) It’s an amazing thing to realize that God has broken down the barrier wall, removed what previously separated us and made us all one in Christ.

Let me close with this story. In France during WWII some American soldiers lost one of their buddies in a battle. They carried his body to a little cemetery. They found a priest who spoke some broken English and they said to him, “If it’s possible sir, we would like to bury our buddy in your cemetery so he could at least have the dignity of a grave in an area that would be kept.” The priest thought for a moment and asked them, “Is he Catholic?” And they said, “No.” The priest replied, “I’m sorry, he cannot be buried here. This is a Catholic cemetery.”

The soldiers were very disheartened and discouraged and they went on their way. They hadn’t walked very far when they said, “Hey, let’s do the next best thing.” And in the darkness of the night as the day was ending, they took their shovels and they dug a grave just a couple of feet outside the fence of the cemetery. “If we can’t be on the inside, we’ll get as close as we can.” And they buried their buddy and covered it over. They went away. In the morning just before their unit moved out, they decided to go back to the grave site to pay one last respect to their fallen comrade. When they arrived at the location, they couldn’t find his grave. They went around and around looking for it. They thought that in the darkness of the night, they must have forgotten where they were. They went and found the priest. And they said, “Sir, can you help us find the grave outside the fence? What happened? Where is it?” “Well,” said the priest, “the first part of the night I stayed awake, sorry for what I told you, and the second part of the night I spent moving the fence.”

Aren’t you glad Jesus moved the fence and included us?