

## Ephesians 2vs1 I-22

A couple of weeks ago Michael Ogilby told us he was considered a bit of a nerd or geek. I come from an earlier generation and growing up in the 1950s/60s there wasn't much technology to be geeky or nerdy about. Your mobile phone was a pair of clean baked bean cans connected by a very long piece of string. We did have Internet though. My mate Woody from Leeds would often shout during footy, stick it Internet. I don't remember being called a nerd or geek in the 1950s. But I was a looper or spacer (space-cadet) because I have a weird sense of humour. For example, I like the Peanuts cartoons which mostly featured Charlie Brown and Snoopy. But one cartoon featured Linus and Lucy van Pelt. Linus is quietly watching TV. In bursts Lucy and demands he changes channel. "What makes you think you can walk in here and take over." "These little guys. Individually they are nothing but together -watch out!" She curled her fingers into a fist and shakes it in Linus's face. He meekly hands over the remote, leaves the room, feeling like a wimp. He looks down at his own fingers and asks, "why can't you guys get organised like that?" The universal Church would have a bit more clout if it worked as one.

Last week, Will guided us expertly through the first half of Eph.2. Paul reminds his readers that they had been saved by the grace of God, the unmerited gift of God, through faith in our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. In today's passage, Paul moves on from the salvation of the individual to another aspect of salvation in which God reconciles Jewish and Gentile converts (previously hostile peoples) not only to Himself but to each other through Christ. But more than that, God unites these reconciled peoples into one body – the new temple- the body of Christ- the Church. Let's remind ourselves why the Jews and Gentiles were hostile to one another. Gen.12 v 1-3. The Lord says to Abraham, "leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you." 500 years later the descendants of Abraham are on the brink of becoming that great nation. They have left their slavery in Egypt. God says to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19 v 5), "tell the people of Israel, now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is mine you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. To our 21st century ears, with our Equality Commission, European Court of human rights and UN charters this may seem unfair. But God is just, righteous, and fair. He set Israel apart, not to lord it over the other nations, but to be an example of how it should look living under God and His law and to enjoy his blessings; to be a channel of God's word; to reveal the one true God and thereby bless all the nations as promised to Abraham. Israel failed in its mission. It kept its distance from its neighbours and enforced its differences nationally, ritually, and legally. This led to a long-standing and mutual animosity between Jew and Gentile. Possibly this historical animosity had spilled over into the young Christian Church at Ephesus. So, Paul reminds his Gentile converts of their spiritual condition, prior to the incarnation of Christ and before their own personal salvation in Christ.

Paul lists the five aspects of Gentile alienation in v.12. 1. separated from Christ. They had no knowledge of the Messiah to come. 2. excluded from citizenship in Israel. They were outside of the special relationship God had with the people of Israel. 3. foreigners to the covenants of promise. They were unaware of the promises made to Abraham. 4. without hope. They had no knowledge of the saviour to come. 5. without God in the world. They lived without any relationship with the one true God, the only One who could save them from spiritual death. Before Christ, the world was divided into Jews and Gentiles, i.e., the people of God and others. Today it is divided into people “in” Christ and people “outside” Christ.

It's a sobering thought that if we are outside Christ, we are in the same spiritual condition Paul describes - alienated from God and other Christians, rebelling against God's authority and knowing little or nothing of Him or His people. Dead in our sins. Here's the good news from Paul. V.13, v18 and 19 But now you are in Christ, you Gentiles are no longer foreigners and aliens but part of God's holy nation, members of God's household and can call God, “Father” because you have access to him by the one Spirit. There is no separation of Jewish believers and Gentile believers. They have been made one. It's a theme Paul returns to in other letters. Rom.10 v12, “for there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Gal.3 v 28, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

How is this reconciliation possible? V13 through the blood of Christ. V.16 through the cross. Through the shedding of his blood, Christ brings peace between God and man. He bore the consequences of our disobedience and sin - separation from God- by his death on the cross. The blood of Christ was the one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. ‘Through the shedding of his blood, Christ brought peace between Jew and Gentile. V.15 he destroyed the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. Paul is saying the law that condemned us before God and separated Jews from Gentiles has been done away with at the cross. All are brought to the same level at the foot of the cross. But is Paul in disagreement with Jesus. Matt.5 Jesus says “I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfil them. Until heaven and earth disappear not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. In its context, Paul is referring to ceremonial law: circumcision, the sacrificial system, dietary constraints, and additional man-made rules regarding ritual cleanness which governed social relationships and enforced a separation between Jew and Gentile. Again, in context, Jesus did not abolish the moral law as a standard of behaving but he did abolish it as the way to salvation. Rom 10 v 4, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness (right standing before God) to everyone who believes. Christ has indeed abolished the law and replaced it with himself. We are under the law of Christ empowered to live like him by the power of the Holy Spirit. Reconciliation to God is not by obedience to the Law but by grace through faith in Christ alone. The Law was a barrier between Jew and Gentile but faith in Christ alone unites them. 2 Cor. 5 v 17 says, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation the old has gone the new has come.” Jesus didn't come to Jewify the Gentiles or Gentify the Jews but v15 his purpose was to create in himself one new man (new humanity) out of the 2. By his death on the cross Jesus has created a new single humanity, united in Himself. This new union bridges more than just the Jew/ Gentile divide. Through baptism of the Holy Spirit every believer shares a common

union of peace with every other believer without exception. Rev.7v9, "There before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." Paul concludes the chapter by telling us this new humanity is being built up into a new temple in the Lord. The old, stone, man-made temple in Jerusalem had been the focal point of Israel's identity as the people of God. It symbolised the dwelling of God with his people on earth. But this new humanity is not a geographically centred nation but international and worldwide. So, the new temple cannot be a material building nor a localised site. It's a spiritual building (God's household) made up of God's redeemed people. This is where God dwells in the Spirit. He dwells with his people individually and as a community. They are his home on earth and his home in heaven. God is not tied to a holy building but to a holy people. God's temple or the body of Christ – the universal Church is not a literal building or an earthly corporation but a living community of faith resting squarely on the holy scriptures and centred intently and entirely on Jesus Christ as cornerstone. This spiritual edifice is organic and continually growing. Its foundation is based on the inspired teaching of the apostles and the prophets who had divine revelation, divine authority and were eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection. The Church is built on these scriptures. They are foundational documents. They cannot be tampered with. God has completed the foundation and we're not at liberty to dig it up and replace it with popular opinion. Christ's church will continue to grow throughout the ages until the creation of the new heaven and the new earth when the voice from the throne of God will declare with finality, "behold now is the dwelling of God with man." (Rev.21v3). All the implications and practical outworking of these truths for Christian living are spelled out in the remaining chapters of Ephesians.

But to finish, here are some thoughts. In the world today those without Christ still like to build walls of partition and division. There can be real physical walls like the Great Wall of China or the Berlin wall. There are also invisible barriers like the so-called Iron curtain and the Bamboo curtain. These partitions are based on political ideology. It would appear Putin would like to resurrect the Iron Curtain. Others construct barriers based on race, colour, caste, tribe, or class. Divisiveness is a constant characteristic of every community without Christ. Sadly, this sort of division is found in Christ's church too.

We erect barriers within our churches: formed from pride, prejudice, jealousy, an unforgiving spirit, denominationalism, which turns churches into sects that contradict the unity and universality of Christ's church. Swindoll says we must live in harmony and love other believers, love the unlovable, and like the unlikeable. Christ wants his Church to be welcoming to strangers, faithful to its gospel foundation and increasingly holy as He is holy. He wants every little church to provide a little foretaste of the glory of heaven. Coekin says every local church, however unimpressive the people, however painful the music and the singing, however tatty the building is a spiritually beautiful expression of the glorious Church of God in heaven.

So next time you attend church do three things. You are welcomed into the precious family of God so love those people deeply. You're built upon the foundation of the scriptures so listen to the teaching carefully. You're constructed as a dwelling of the Spirit of God so be holy in the way you behave. Finally, I'm not sure if you've ever tried to build a dry-stone wall. If you take the inland route from Newcastle up to Silent Valley reservoir you will see

some beautiful examples and you sort of think to yourself how hard can that be? Well, I find out.

About 30 years ago a friend organised a small work party to go up to his caravan in Donegal to secure it for the winter and to knock down a gable wall of an old derelict cottage that stood on the site. He suggested we could rebuild the wall at the front of the site using the stone from the gable wall. We got the wall to about 3 foot high and ran out of stone. The farmer just happened to come by, and we asked him what he thought of the wall. He paced up and down, looked at the wall, took off his cap, scratched his head and said I'm thinking will it be there in the morning? 1 Peter 2v5 says, "you, like living stones are being built into a spiritual house." Our Lord is a professional builder, and He can use even the odd shaped stones in the building of his church. He uses the geek, the nerd, the looper, the spacer, the strong, the weak, the person of colour, the white person, the rich the poor, the educated and uneducated. All Jesus asks is that you submit to him and make yourself available to serve him unconditionally. **Unlike my stone wall, Jesus tells us in Matt. 16v18," I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."** It's in unity that we will overcome the testing of Covid, Putin and economic hardships.