

Unified with Jews – Eph. 2

When we hear the word “slavery”, we usually think about the horrific history that the United States has with it but did you know that slavery is as old as civilization itself? There are records of slavery all the way back to 3500 BC. And it still goes on today in countries all across the globe. One person can buy another person and do whatever they want with that person even today. That blows my mind. I hate to think about it.

It's awful that a man can take as property another man just because he has the finances to do so. It is just human nature for us to think that we are better than somebody else or somebody else is lesser than us because of the amount of money we have or the culture of another or the color of another's skin. That makes absolutely no sense.

C.S. Lewis said, *“Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows. Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. I do not contradict him. But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.”* (C.S. Lewis in "Equality" from Present Concerns, quoted in *Christianity Today*, February 3, 1989, p. 31.)

He's right. Mankind is so fallen. None of us should be masters over another and none of us should look down on another for any reason. But it has been happening and it will continue to happen until the second coming of Jesus. Even in New Testament days, women were also looked down on as inferior beings. Husbands often treated their wives little better than they did their slaves. When a wife became a Christian, her entire life, outlook, and value system changed. An unbelieving husband would likely divorce her simply because she had made such a radical decision without his consent.

Hopefully, at least in first world countries, that is no longer the case but there is definitely still a feeling by lots of people that they are somehow superior to another group of people. And one way that we still see it is in antisemitism. People hate the Jewish people just because they are Jews. And that is very dangerous because God said to Abram and his descendants in **Genesis 12**, *“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.”*

The nation of Israel and the Jewish people have always been God's chosen people. They are special and they always will be. And I'm fine with that. God made promises to the Jewish people in the Old Testament that didn't apply to everybody else back then but because of Jesus, we are now grafted into that group of special people. That does not mean that the church has replaced the Jews. It means that we have been added into the family by adoption and by God's grace. Thank you, Lord!

But the problem with God choosing them to be special is that some Jews in the past have looked down on anybody that wasn't Jewish. The Apostle Paul was Jewish and he had a problem with that thinking as we will read in the second half of the second chapter of the book of Ephesians.

We are continuing our in-depth study of this great epistle and we will see that Paul explains that we as Gentiles are now united with the Jews in all the ways that really matter. So far, in the last few weeks we have seen that we as believers should be unified with each other because that is God's choice. We are unified with each other because of Jesus. We are unified in that we are now alive spiritually and that God has given us the power to stay unified with each other if we stay unified with Him.

So, let's turn to **Ephesians 2** and we will read **verses 11-22** and we will see that we are unified with the Jewish people and why that matters. **Ephesians 2:11-22** says, *“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by*

human hands)—¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by 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, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

I've been told before that there are three kinds of people in this world, those that are good at math and those that aren't. I don't know about that but I do know that there are really two kinds of people, Jews and Gentiles. All of us gathered here this morning are considered Gentiles. And Paul starts off this section by pointing out all the liabilities we had against us as Gentiles before Jesus came along to change it all. All this division and strife between people is just another result of sin. But Jesus came to remove all results of sin in all its forms. **Ephesians 2** tells us what two of these forms are and what Jesus did to change them.

The first change that we have in Jesus Christ is a new position as *individuals*. Although we are all sinners and deserving judgement, God stepped in and gave us a new position in Christ. Rather than death and destruction, we have deliverance. We have peace with God and have been seated with Christ in heavenly places. All of this we have already seen in Ephesians 2:1-10. That was our new position as individuals.

The rest of Ephesians 2 tells us about the new position we have as a *corporate body*—as a church. Now in **verses 11-12**, Paul once again reminds us of the condition in which we walked as unbelieving members of this world. ([Ephesians 2:11-12 - Remember When ... - Redeeming God](#)) Paul reminds us that we were separated from each other and the Jews looked down on us for several reasons.

He says we had five strikes against us as compared to the Jew. Look at **verse 12** again. "*you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.*" And that is absolutely right. So, you can see, at least partially, why the Jewish people looked down at the Gentiles. This list of five things is how we all are in and of ourselves. Without Jesus we have no claim to Heaven. We have no claim to real peace or joy in the difficult times. We have no promises of God, no forgiveness of God, no redemption; nothing to look forward to except what this world brings and until God draws us to Him, we have no interest in any of that!

But now look at **verse 13** and I want to show you something that I learned this week. Verse 13 says, "*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*" Now, that's a good verse no matter how you look at it but it's really neat to see it through a Jewish filter. Jews always thought of Gentiles as being far away from God. God is over here with us and Gentiles are way over there, can barely see them. They are horrible people and have no hope and are little better than dogs or pigs. And before Jesus came, when a Gentile wanted to become a Jew, he was said to want to be brought near. A Gentile man would go to a rabbi and say, "*Rabbi, I want to be brought near.*" That meant that the man wanted to convert. So, now read **verse 13** again. "*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*"

Have you ever heard of a plant called a “monstera deliciosa”? It is sort of like a philodendron and often kept as houseplants. But it gets its name from its looks and its fruit. “Monstera” means monster because it looks wild with big, perforated leaves but it produces delicious fruit, hence the other part of its name, “deliciosa.” Delicious monster.

Now, if you take a vine or a cutting from another plant like a philodendron and graft that onto the monstera deliciosa, the plants become one but the plant changes. It’s no longer a monstera deliciosa but rather a hybrid version of both. That is exactly what happens when we become Christians. We are grafted into the family of God as Gentiles. We join the Jews as God’s chosen people but it’s not the same as Judaism anymore. We’re not under the Law of Moses. And they aren’t far away from God.

Now, this does not mean that Jews are automatically going to Heaven because of their Old Testament relationship with God. They still have to become followers of Jesus, and that’s a big problem for most Jews. They don’t want to accept Him as Lord and Savior because they are still waiting for their Messiah to come as an earthly king and they are missing the new covenant (or promise) that God has made with man through Jesus.

Look at **verse 14** again. *“For he himself (Jesus) is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”* In the temple there were several walls and several courtyards. The outermost court was the court of the Gentiles. It was the lowest and biggest of the courts. Then there was the court of women, then the inner court, the court of the priests and then the Holy of Holies. The Gentiles could only go to the court of Gentiles and if they went farther, they could be killed. There was a wall there that they could not pass or go through.

Paul is saying that Jesus destroyed that barrier like He did with the curtain leading to the Holy of Holies at His crucifixion. He has made the two groups one – or at least made it possible for the two groups to come together – all they have to do is believe in Jesus for their eternity. That’s hard for some Jews and some Gentiles to do for whatever reasons.

Verses 15-19 continue that thought that Jesus has provided Jews and Gentiles to be reconciled together to God, unified as one body under Jesus. That tells us who we are as individuals and then Paul finishes it off by saying that all of us together, Jews and Gentiles, are a holy building of people that is inhabited by the same Holy Spirit of God. That’s pretty cool, right? And so many of you are thinking, “Yes, that’s great. And even better that finally the preacher isn’t stepping on my toes today.” Well, let’s think about something.

In the days of Paul, the Jews had rules about what a person could or could not eat. They had rules about what a person had to wear, and what festivals to celebrate in which way and on and on and on. They had over 6000 of these types of rules.

And the Jews would not associate with anyone who didn’t try to keep all of these rules, which meant they would not associate with Gentiles—even if they were Gentile Christians (Acts 10; 15; Gal. 2:11-13). We don’t struggle with these kinds of things in the church today, right? We’re past all of this rule keeping, right? ... Or are we?

Look around and you’ll see conflicts between denominations, within denominations and in churches with no denomination. We have disunity between Christians and non-Christians, and even within churches full of Christians. Churches have split over what sort of ministries and programs a church should have, who should lead them, who should attend them and how they should be held. Churches have split over dress codes. Should people wear shorts and T-shirts or three-piece suits? Should women wear full length dresses or allowed to wear skirts or pants! Churches have split over something the pastor said, or something the pastor wore, or how he prays.

I have heard of churches that have rules about going to the movies, wearing cosmetics, playing cards, watching television, going to the beach, not having a “quiet time” every day, going to a restaurant that sells liquor, wearing certain clothing, driving certain cars, wearing certain jewelry, listening to certain music, dancing, holding a certain job, wearing your hair a certain way, having certain possessions, drinking coffee, eating certain foods, drinking certain drinks, celebrating certain holidays, reading certain books, or certain magazines, and even what version of the Bible you have to read and bring to church.

Good grief! Sounds like a bunch of Pharisees to me. Our church has always said that we don’t have any rules. Okay, okay, we did make that one rule about bringing whiskey to church but that was for that one guy. That doesn’t count. We don’t have any rules and that kind of church isn’t for everybody. Some people are better suited for a church with rules. But we believe that we should all be under the rules the Holy Spirit leads us to follow. Not man-made rules. If you are a true follower of Jesus and you are a Spirit-filled believer then who am I to say that you can or can’t do something?

If two of us can’t get along for some reason, sin is at the center of it somewhere. We can disagree in our opinions but we can still get along and love each other and forgive each other when we take it too far. And if you can’t then maybe you need to find a church that focuses more on rules than on not sinning. Our focus at Christ Fellowship is about honoring God and reaching others for the Kingdom. We don’t look down on people who do things differently. But that’s our focus.

Does that sound like you? Is your focus right now on moving to another building? Is your focus on what your comfort level is going to be at the new building? How about we all focus on making God look good so other people can have what we have? We can be unified in that.

Maybe today you don’t have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus at all. As the music plays, now is the time to answer that still, small voice of God that is calling you to truly be a follower of Jesus. Ask God to forgive you of all your sins and repent of those sins – turn away from that lifestyle. We are all sinners and we all deserve Hell but God sent Jesus to pay the price we couldn’t pay and all you have to do is believe and let that belief change your life. Do that right now.