

EPHESIANS

WEEK 3: CHAPTER 2:11-3:21

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK - RECAP

- Many have written on this book – MacArthur, Sproul, Jeremiah, to name just a few. I hope to do justice to it.
- Why are we studying this, or any, books of Scripture? We are to be diligent to present ourselves approved to God as workmen who are not ashamed, accurately handling (“rightly dividing”) the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15)
- One of the Prison Epistles, while in prison in Rome waiting trial before Nero. Assuming this is true, likely written around AD 60-62.
- Titled The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, but since there is no mention of the people or issues particular to the church in that city, likely it was intended as an encyclical letter to all the churches in Asia Minor (present day Turkey), sent first to Ephesus. It, and the letters to Colossae and Philemon, were likely carried by Tychicus and Onesimus to the area.
- Paul stayed at Ephesus for 3 years on his 3rd missionary journey and had started a church there on his 2nd trip. He left Timothy to pastor it when he moved on after the 3 years. Ephesus was a large, important city, known as a commercial center, and best known for the Temple of Artemis – one of the 7 wonders of the Ancient World. Paul’s teaching against idols resulted in a citywide riot to protect the profit traders got from their sale and the reputation of Artemis (Acts 19). Because of the prominence of the city and the ministry Paul started, Christianity established a significant foothold in Asia Minor. The Moody commentary on the book said that after 2 years all of Asia Minor had heard the Word of God, both Jew and Gentile.
- Overall themes of the book:
 - The Unity of the Church (4:1-6, 25, 2:11-22)
 - An emphasis on Christ’s exalted state, rather than His sufferings (1:20-23)
 - Community life and ethics (4:25-32, 5:1-14, 5:22-33, 6:5-9)
 - Present day (realized) spiritual blessings, rather than future (1:3, 2:6, 4:4, 5:8)
 - Spiritual warfare in life (5:6-11, 6:10-20)
- Moving on to the passage for this lesson: Ephesians 2:11 – 3:21

GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE PASSAGE

- Various outlines of the passage [Ex.: ...]
- An Outline:
 - Peace [vv. 2:11-2:22]
 - In the World
 - In the world
 - Without hope
 - In Christ
 - Barrier broken
 - One new man
 - In One Body
 - Members of God's household
 - Growing together in the Spirit
 - Partakers of the Promise [vv. 3:1-13]
 - Given to Paul
 - Prisoner . . .
 - Servant (minister) [1 Cor. 3:5]
 - Given to the Gentiles
 - Riches of Christ
 - With Christ in God (Col 3:3)
 - Given to Us
 - Through the Church
 - In Christ
 - Picking Back Up (Prayer) [vv. 3:14-21]
 - Strengthened in the Spirit
 - Filled up in God
 - Glorify God in Christ
- High level view; now to look closely at the passages.

PEACE – IN CHRIST (2:11-22)

- In verses 2:11-13, Paul speaks to the Gentiles, describing for them the new relationship they have in Christ
- They were on the “outside”, not members of the Circumcision – the Jews had contempt for the Gentiles. They even had a law – one of the scribal additions – that said helping a Gentile woman in childbirth would bring another Gentile into the world.
- Paul calls them Gentiles (v. 11, pagans, ἔθνη – we get our word ethnic from this) and strangers (v. 12, ξένοι, foreigners). If you’ve ever traveled to another country, you know what it’s like to be there, or even live there. The things we take for granted can be very different, and we have to live within the laws of another culture, not the one we came from. This was what it was like for the Gentiles living among the Jews.
- Later, in verse 19, Paul uses a more indicative reference, calling them strangers and aliens (παροικος, a word that describes someone who is not in their home). As we know, we will be home, when we are in our eternal home.
- They were:
 - Without hope of the Messiah
 - Excluded from the chosen people Israel
 - Not participating in the Covenants of promise the Jews had been given
 - Without hope
 - Without God
- As we know from our study of the Covenants in Wednesday Night Theology, the Jewish people were given a special status as His chosen people (Ex. 6:7). Gentiles were aliens, forbidden to enter the inner areas of the Temple, kept at a distance, and generally ostracized.
- In verse 13 though, Paul says that Gentiles have been “brought near”; the literal translation would be “become near” (ἐγγενθῆτε ἐγγύς), which is a passive statement. We Gentiles didn’t do anything; it was done for us.
- “But now” – whenever we see these words, it suggests that a major shift has occurred in God’s revelation to us. Ex: Rom. 3:21 ***But now***, *apart from the Law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.* D.M. Lloyd-Jones, in his multi-volume, 13 year (!) Friday night sermons on Romans did an entire one on just these 2 words! He called it “The Great Turning Point.” Also, 1 Peter 2:10 *Once you were not a people, ***but now*** you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*
- One writer says that the phrase “serves as a pivotal marker in Scripture, often indicating a transition from a previous state of being to a new reality brought about by God’s intervention.”

- But to what, or to Whom, were we brought near? [vv. 14-21]
 - Paul uses the image of a dividing wall, a picture of the Temple.
 - The Temple consisted of 5 “courts” – Gentiles, Women, Israelites, Priests, Holy Place – each a bit higher as you progressed in.
 - The penalty for a Gentile going further in than the outer court would be death.
 - The Holy Place, as we know from Scripture, had a curtain – 3” to 4” in thickness! – to keep anyone but the High Priest out, and only on the Day of Atonement. And when Christ died, this curtain was ripped in half, signifying the breaking down of the barrier, and the beginning of the New Covenant in Christ’s blood.
- But Paul also says that Christ is “our peace”, making both groups – Jews and Gentiles – one. This is not by means of the Law!
- In a legal case, generally one group wins and one group loses. The result isn’t unity, but merely in a settling of the dispute, or what separated the two parties.
- Here, Paul says that Christ brought both groups together by getting rid of the inherent enmity that the Covenant of the Law (the Mosaic covenant) caused, since the Jews were given this Covenant and the Gentiles weren’t.
- The peace we have is not because we became part of the Covenants the Jews had been given, but according to the New Covenant, the Law of Christ, which is the Law of love. Going back to the illustration of the legal case, if someone both parties love seeks their resolution, there is greater assurance that the dispute will dissolve and they will have peace with each other, and with the One they both love! This is what Paul is saying Christ did on the cross (v. 16). As one writer describes it, it is a “two-directional restoration”.
- In His death, the enmity that resulted from unequal status of Jews and Gentiles was abolished. The word Paul uses (καταργεω) means to invalidate or wipe out. And in the past tense (aorist), indicates that it is a done deal, completed, taken care of for good.
- But how do we access this peace? Is it given to everyone? Are all Gentiles and Jews suddenly one body?
- In Romans 5:1, speaking of the peace we have that is described in this Ephesians passage, Paul says that “having been justified **by faith** we have peace with God.”
 - It is by faith in the One who gave His life on our behalf that we are given the peace our souls long for.
 - It is a directional focus – the faith is directed in Christ – and a new identity.
 - Paul is telling the Ephesians, and all who read this letter, you may be in Ephesus (or . . . , or Grand Rapids), but fundamentally you (we) are in Christ!

- We yearn to be part of “the group”, and we dislike being excluded. But this was just what state Gentiles were in before the Cross.
 - Being “in” the group gives us a sense of value; being outside can make us feel inferior. C. S. Lewis said that there can be no “inner ring” if one was a despised outsider – this was what state the Gentiles were in previously.
 - But now, there is no “we/they” for those of us who are in Christ.
- Paul concludes this section in verse 19, which one writer says the whole message of Ephesians pivots. He says that we are no longer strangers and aliens, but we are:
 - Fellow citizens with the saints
 - Of God’s household
 - Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets
 - Growing into a holy temple in the Lord
 - And into a dwelling of God in the Spirit
- Contrast this list with what we were before Christ, as strangers, aliens, and foreigners:
 - Without hope of the Messiah
 - Excluded from the chosen people Israel
 - Not participating in the Covenants of promise the Jews had been given
 - Without hope
 - Without God
- From hopeless to hope; from outside and excluded to fellow citizen, from prohibited participation to a growing member of the body of Christ, and from no relation to God to one who has access in the beloved.
- In a sermon by Dr. Haddon Robinson on the book of Philemon, he gives the following illustration:
 - Dr. Robinson visited the home of his future bride for the first time. Coming to the door, his Mother-in-Love-to-be welcomed him in warmly, offered any food he might need in the refrigerator or pantry, showed him a room where he could stay while visiting, and his future Father-in-love-to-be gave him the keys to the car, filled up, of course, and said he could use it as needed while he was there.
 - He contrasted that with what it would have been like if he’d just shown up without any relation to their daughter. He might have gotten a sandwich to go, and they probably wouldn’t have called the police since he didn’t look dangerous. But no room, no car, and no open kitchen.
 - All that he was given was because he was “in the beloved” with their daughter; everything they would do for her they did for him also.
- This is who the Ephesian believers were, and who we are now, in Christ.

PARTAKERS OF THE PROMISE (3:1-13)

- In verse 1 of this passage, Paul begins a prayer, but as is often the case with him, something triggers a thought that must be said, and he breaks off to follow the thread. He will pick up this thread in the later section (v. 14).
 - For this reason, I, Paul . . . (v. 1)
 - For this reason, I bow the knee . . . (v. 14)
 - Because of all that he has said in the previous verses, he bows the knee before the Father in prayer and praise to God, who has brought this all to be, in Christ.
 - But this will have to wait for the later passage.
- Verses 2-13 are one long segue. Spurgeon described Paul as one who “frequently went off at a tangent; he often left the subject on which he was writing, turned his thoughts in another direction, and then came back, and went on with the subject which he had left.”
- As a prisoner of Christ for the sake of the Gentiles, Paul says
 - He was given a stewardship
 - He was made aware of a mystery, and his insight into it, in Christ
 - This mystery was not made known before
 - Gentiles are now fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of Christ, through the Gospel
 - To make the administration of this mystery known
- What does Paul mean when he says he has been given a “stewardship”. Later in this same letter he describes himself as an “ambassador in chains”.
 - Steward – one who is appointed to represent the affairs of a person, business, or government.
 - When they speak they carry the same authority as who they represent, as if coming directly from them.
 - The Greek word is “οικονομία” – we get our word “economy”.
 - Paul isn’t talking about physical assets, but a spiritual mystery of God’s grace not revealed before. What is at stake in this new mystery that Paul is preaching is not money, or property, or something like that; it is an eternal reward that is on the table, as it were – our eternal state!
- The reward is not monetary, but is eternal.
- The mystery was not discovered by Paul, but was revealed, first to the apostles and prophets of that day, and then to Paul himself.

- Unlike religions – Christianity is first of all a relationship, not a religion – we don’t come up with new revelations on our own.
- Scripture clearly states that the canon is closed (ex.: Rev. 22:18-19)
- It is not a “it seems to me” thing, as in “it seems to me what the Scripture is saying is . . .”
- We want to know what the Scripture actually says, and how it applies to our life, which is as Paul says, a work of the Spirit.
- And we know that this mystery, though not known to earlier generations as Paul says, was foretold in various passages of the OT.
 - Is. 42:6 says, speaking of the coming Messiah, “I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations.”
 - Is. 49:6, also speaking of His Servant, the coming Messiah, “I will also make You a light of the nations, so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”
 - Hosea 2:23: “And I will say to those who were not my people, ‘You are My people!’ And they will say, ‘my God!’”
- In verses 3:6-7, Paul goes on to say what this new unification of Jews and Gentiles means. We are (now):
 - Fellow heirs. We now have an inheritance in the family of God, where before we were kept apart from it.
- Similarly, we are “fellow members of the body”. Before this change, the only way a Gentile could become a member of the family of God was to become a convert to Judaism. But all that changed as a result of Christ’s work. In “*Knowing God*”, J. I. Packer writes there are 6 things we should tell ourselves every day to remember what has been given to us:
 - I am a child of God
 - God is my Father
 - Heaven is my home
 - Every day is one day nearer
 - My Savior is my brother
 - Every Christian is my brother too.

Much could be said about these 6 things, but when we simply hear them we realize what an incredible, astounding gift we have been given by virtue of being in Christ.

- And we are:

- Fellow partakers of the promise(s). Specifically, forgiveness of our sins, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and so much more!
- Paul concludes this first section of chapter 3 by saying that he was made a minister by God’s grace – the original is διακονος, from which we get the word “deacon”. He is simply saying that he is a servant, working in the power of Christ, not his own.
- Now, Paul goes on to illustrate how he views his role. In one commentary, this passage is described as “the privilege which makes us humble”. Anyone tasked with preaching or teaching the Word of God must remember that we are merely instruments in His hand; it is not our wisdom or ability which is on display, but we serve to point everything back to God the Son and God the Father.
- We know there are times in Scripture when Paul recounts his background in order to give credibility to his teaching (ex., 1 Cor. 9, 2 Cor. 11, Gal 1), but more often than not, Paul reflects any praise on him to Christ, and minimizes his role (ex., 1 Cor. 3, 1 Cor. 15, 2 Cor. 3), as here. He says:
 - He is the least of all saints. The word for “least” is a word from which we get our word “elastic” – that which returns to its smallest size when it is stretched – and which means lowest in status, smallest in nature, or little importance. If we remember when we were kids, choosing sides for who would be on the team, this one would no doubt be the last person chosen.
 - He was given grace to preach the riches of Christ to the Gentiles
 - He is bringing to light the administration of the mystery described earlier – he is simply a mediator of this mystery.
- Contrast Paul’s view of himself with terminology he uses for Christ – “unfathomable riches” – and who revealed the “manifold” wisdom of God. He:
 - Created all things. Think of that just for a minute: the God who created everything we see and can’t see, we have been adopted into as a brother.
 - Is God’s manifold wisdom. “Manifold” here means ‘very many sided’, or “diverse”, and is the only use of that word in all of Scripture. Paul was masterful at using rarely employed terms for all sorts of descriptions in Scripture; he was what we might call a “wordsmith”, a person who is able to find just the right word for the situation.
 - Is wisdom (σοφια) personified, where we get the sophistry, which means a wise man, or an expert. Paul is telling us here that God’s wisdom – sometimes referred to as foolishness to men – is sufficient to overcome anything that life – the world, the flesh, and the devil – may bring against us. And this wisdom comes to us through the church. We should never overlook or underestimate the need for being in the church; Christianity is never a solo journey.

- Is eternal, and His purposes are eternal. We often focus on this moment, but we must always keep in mind the eternal purposes of God's work in us, despite – and in addition to! – the particular circumstances we face at any point in time. Scripture describes this as “the eternal weight of glory” that every light and momentary circumstance is forming in us, though we often don't see them as either light or momentary (2 Cor. 4:17).
- Is the vehicle by which these eternal purposes are being carried out.
- Think on these things! When we meet as a church, we are demonstrating to the “rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” – the evil spiritual forces (Eph. 1:21, 6:12, Col. 2:10) – that God is overcoming their evil purposes in this world.
- And it shows us that none of this was an afterthought or sudden idea that God had – it was always in accordance with His eternal purpose, planned from before time began.
- So we might ask ourselves these questions:
 - Do we minimize ourselves and maximize Christ?
 - Are we humble, as Paul was?
 - Do we admit that “every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, in whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (James 1:17)?
- Paul concludes this diversionary section by encouraging the readers not to worry or lose heart because of what he is going through – his suffering is for their glory and good in bringing the Gospel message to them. What a testament to “the privilege which makes us humble”!

PICKING BACK UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF (3:14-21)

- In verse 14, Paul returns to his previous thought – “For this reason . . .” Paul picks up where he left off in verse 1 of chapter 3.
- He bows his knees before the Father.
 - This is the God who our pastor preached on earlier this month, for Psalm 19. We learned of the vastness of the expanse of the universe He created, the intricacies of the smallest and most complex things, such as the eye, or the ear. It is this Father – omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and so much more – that Paul not only recognizes, but bows before.
 - Not simply a bowing of the head and/or closing of the eyes, but a position of total submission to his Father God. Is this the high view we have of this same God who is our Father?

- And he begins his prayer, recognizing that all of us on earth have our origin in God, whether we recognize it or not.
 - Ps. 139 teaches that, for everyone, God “knit us together in the womb”. He is intimately involved in the creation of every person on earth. He knows us intimately; better than we know ourselves!
- Paul’s prayer is for two things: **strengthening** (vv. 16-17) and **knowledge** (vv. 18-19). For strengthening:
 - It is not a physical strength, but our inner being – our heart, including our intellect, our emotions, our conscience, and our will.
 - This is spiritual strengthening – the power of the Spirit working in us to study, understand, and live by the Word of God.
 - We become weaker as we get older, but we should be getting spiritually stronger as we are more and more conformed to the image of Christ.
 - This is not something special for select Christians; it is for all of us.
 - And Paul uses the image of a plant – rooted and grounded. We recall the parable of the soils – the good soil, which Paul is certainly referring to, results in growth and fruit as the plant takes its nourishment through its roots.
 - We are on solid ground, firmly established for whatever difficulties life brings on us.
 - This is sanctification at work in us!
- And for knowledge:
 - It is vast. Job understood this. Job 11:8 speaks of God’s knowledge as high as heaven and deep as Sheol – beyond discovery. And after God asks him a series of questions in chapters 38-39 – Did you? Can you? Where were you? Have you ever? Who are you? – Job speaks the truth: God is infinitely greater.
 - It surpasses knowledge. 1 Cor. 13:8-13 teaches us that in this life, we only know things partially, and we see things dimly and clouded – only partial. And Phil. 4:7 says that the peace of God “surpasses all comprehension”. And Rom. 11:33-34: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!
 - When Paul speaks of that which “surpasses knowledge”, he is using terms that mean going beyond knowledge. This is not simply the kind of head knowledge we get from reading books, but it is intimate, as when you have known a person for so many years that you are almost one entity instead of two.

- This is the kind of knowledge Paul is praying that God will grant to us, as we grow in His love. We become filled up, to the fullness of God.
- This, too, is the process of sanctification at work in us!
- Paul ends this section with a doxology that makes clear that God’s work is in us individually, but shown also in the church, which is Christ’s bride for all of eternity.
 - One commentator writes: “Within every individual, the fight rages between the evil and the good. It is God’s design that all people and all nations should become one in Christ. To achieve this end, Christ needs the Church to go out and tell the world of His love and of His mercy. And the Church cannot do that until its members, joined together, in fellowship, experience the limitless love of Christ.”

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

What principles and takeaways can we learn from this passage?

1. Christ is our peace. He is the author and source of the peace we now have with God.
 - a. This is not a legal reconciliation, but one based on Christ’s Law of Love. We are no longer “outsiders”, strangers and aliens to the faith. We have been, as Paul describes in Romans 11, “grafted in” and now are granted salvation by faith in Christ.
2. Not only have we been given peace, but we are “brought near” to God; we are in the beloved.
 - a. We have been adopted into the family of God. He is our Father, Christ is our Brother, and Home is not here but is Heaven.
3. When we come together on Sunday mornings, we are demonstrating to the evil forces that God is overcoming their purposes in the world.
 - a. Christianity is not lived in a solo experience. It is true that we no longer have a mediator – a Priest, or someone like that. While we are in a “priesthood of the believer” relationship to God, we are also called to fellowship with other believers in Christ’s Bride, the Church.
4. We are called to continue to grow in our spiritual strength and our knowledge of God, increasingly becoming sanctified in Christlikeness.