

Ephesians

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[0 : 00] If you will look at your scripture sheet, we are still continuing with Ephesians chapter 2, and we have just briefly noted the enormous contrast that takes place, and it is found in verse 13, and it has to do with the two words, But now.

Be reminded, the Apostle Paul is also reminding the people at Ephesus as to what they were compared to what they are now. And what they were previously was pretty pathetic. Verse 12 says, At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. They had absolutely nothing going for them. Just a whole list of negatives. Each of these, prior to being in Christ, could contemplate nothing less than facing the justice of God. And that is not a place where anyone wants to be. Yet, that is that which is reserved necessarily so. For those who are not recipients of the grace of God, there is nothing remaining for them but the justice of God.

[1 : 22] And the justice of God requires that the recipient receive exactly, precisely what is deserved. Not one bit more, not one bit less.

I've often said that the very least that God can do is impart justice to someone. He cannot do less than that.

But He can do more. And that's where grace comes in. Because He can impart grace to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what delivers men from the justice of God.

And I've never really thought of it too much this way, but it is actually true. If you stop and think about it, when you share the gospel with someone, you are potentially rescuing that person from the justice of the Almighty.

And you are offering them an entrance into the grace of God, out of the justice of God.

[2 : 30] And it is the most wonderful transaction anyone could ever undertake. And it begins with the, but now. But now. That's the contrast. As opposed to who and what you were before.

But now. In Christ Jesus. You. Who aforetime. It's a better translation than sometimes. Because sometimes sounds rather ambiguous.

Sometimes sounds like, well, sometimes you were and sometimes you weren't. And it doesn't mean that at all. A better translation is aforetime. Alfred translates it.

You were aforetime far off. But now. You are made nigh. By the blood of Christ.

And being made nigh, of course, is an old English expression. We probably don't use it much anymore. But it simply means close. It means near. You are brought near.

[3 : 30] Actually, we are even better than being brought near. We are placed into. So that we become members of his body. And the basis for that is the blood of Christ.

Christ. And the blood of Christ is a technical expression, really, that is used throughout the New Testament. Whereby, most often, it does not refer to the actual literal blood of Christ.

It refers to the death of Christ. And we use the expression, and the writers use the expression, because it is, well, it's kind of like a figurative expression.

It is the death of Christ. It is the death of Christ, which resulted in the shedding of his blood. And when you use the word blood, it somehow carries a connotation that is more vivid than even simply saying death.

When Cain slew Abel, the Lord said, the blood of your brother Abel cries out to me from the ground.

[4 : 38] And that's a poetic way of placing an emphasis on the subject that death is kind of vague, but blood is very literal.

It's very red. And we're very much in tune with the idea of blood. Actually, a lot more than we are death. Because most all of us have experienced blood, but none of us here have experienced

death.

That awaits us. But we cannot speak about the certainty of death the way we can the certainty of blood. Because we know that, we've experienced it, we've bled, we've seen that, you know.

And it's an expression that is used very often in the scriptures. And it talks about being washed in the blood. And that too is a pretty graphic way of saying something.

Because we don't tend to think of anything being washed in blood. We think of being washed in soap suds and water and cleansing. But the point of the fact is, there is an actual cleansing power in blood.

[5 : 46] Matter of fact, guys, you realize that our blood coursing through our veins right now carries with it cleansing agents.

And our blood cleanses our organs, our liver, our lungs. All of these things are perpetually being cleansed by the properties that are in our blood.

And it's the most incredible thing that God has established with the human body. And the way it works, it's just mind-boggling, really. But blood is a study in itself, and it's a very profitable one.

And it's a very powerful concept. We have been made nigh or brought into the person of Christ through the blood of Christ or through the sacrificial death of Christ.

For he is our peace. Natural man in an unregenerate state, Paul reminds us in the book of Romans, is at enmity with God.

[6 : 54] That means there is a state of war that exists between the creator and the creatures. And this was realized because of the fall.

It all begins there. And that's where our alienation started in being separated from God. And that which changed everything and ended the war. Brought in a peace process that is incredible.

And it is through that finished work, the finished work of Jesus Christ, he is our peace. He is our living peace. Philip surrenders it.

And he has made both one. The both refers to Jew and Gentile. Never before had these two elements been one.

If there was anything that characterized the Jew as much as anything else, it was his separateness from all other humanity.

[7 : 59] It was a very peculiar thing. God called him and said, made you to be a peculiar people. And he gave them guidelines. He gave them laws. He gave them statutes and ordinances.

All of which were designed to maintain their separate identity. And the Jew really prided himself in that. We talked a little bit about circumcision earlier. And he had other things that separated him from humanity in general.

There were certain foods that he couldn't eat. The Gentiles were always eating. But if you were a Jew, you could not eat those things. And there was a certain day. Gentiles weren't under any obligation to observe any particular day above any other day.

But if you were a Jew, you would observe the Sabbath. That seventh day. Now, Paul is saying those distinctions and those barriers are gone.

They've been obliterated. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. And a completely new order has been introduced that hits humanity like a bombshell.

[9 : 13] And that is, you know all of those distinctions? All of those things that marked the Jew as being separate before? They're all done away. They're over and done with.

Now, make no mistake about it. Unbelieving Israel never departed from those things. Unbelieving Jews continued right on with the Sabbath, with their kosher diet, with the circumcision, with everything else.

Simply because they did not recognize the validity of what Christ had accomplished. They did not believe him to be the Messiah. So, as far as they were concerned, it was just business as usual.

Well, nothing had changed. They were still under the law of Moses. They had not even an inkling that the law of Moses had now become passé.

And yet, had they read a little more carefully their own scriptures, You could recognize in Jeremiah 31, in particular verse 31 and that whole passage, that the time is coming when God was going to set aside the law of Moses and bring in a whole new covenant.

[10 : 27] And that is called the new covenant. The Mosaic law is called the old covenant. And Jeremiah spells it out 500 years before Christ ever arrived on the scene.

That the time was coming when God would establish a new covenant with us. And you know, that covenant has never been entered into. The benefits of that new covenant have never been applied to Israel, nor has Israel ever recognized it.

They were thinking in terms of the law of Moses being as eternal as the God who gave it. And the thought that the law of Moses could ever pass away or be superseded by something else never entered their mind.

Perish the thought. Don't even give that an idea. That's impossible. But that's exactly what happened when Christ died on that cross and said, It is finished.

All the obligation to the law was over and done with because of the sacrificial payment that Christ had made. And it is that law that has delivered us from the law of sin and death.

[11 : 39] Delivered humanity from the law of sin and death. And he has broken down the middle wall of partition between us. The wall which kept us apart.

Wabas says the hostile dividing wall. The New American Standard says broke down the barrier of the dividing wall. And this was an actual literal barrier.

If you look at the description that is given of the temple area on the temple mount, there were several courts.

And these courts were designated according to who was allowed in them. In the inner circle closest to the temple proper, there was a court.

It was a space. It was an area that was called the court of the priests. You were not allowed in that area.

[12 : 38] Even if you were a Jew. If you were not a priest, you were not allowed in the court of the priests. Then there was the court of Israel.

That was the court where all the men were allowed if they were Jewish. Then there was a court of the women. Women were allowed in that particular court.

These are designated areas around the temple area. And then there was that which was called the court of the Gentiles. That was the extreme outer perimeter.

And it had a barrier built all around it. It was like a fence or a gate all the way around that barrier. Completely encircling it.

And it was a huge area. And there were signs posted on it every so many feet. That if you were not a seed of Abraham, if you were not a Jew, you were not allowed to move beyond this fence.

[13 : 44] And you did so at your own peril. In the book of Acts, a maddening crowd is going to accuse the apostle Paul of bringing a non-Jew beyond that barrier.

Now, he never did that. There's no indication that he ever did that. But that's the accusation that was made, leveled against him by a frenzied mob who wanted to tear him limb from limb.

And they knew that if they said that, if they noised that abroad, if they said, Hey, everybody, this is the guy that brought a Gentile beyond the gate of the Gentiles, the crowd would immediately erupt. And that's exactly what happened. And they came upon Paul physically and accosted him and were ready to tear him limb from limb. And the only thing that saved him was the Roman guard looking down on that scene and seeing the riot break out.

And they sent troops down there to intervene. And the rest, of course, is history. It ended up in Paul's arrest and the trip to Rome and so on. Dana? When you visited there, I believe the temple is still there.

[14 : 55] The building is still there. And if so, did you go to all these courts or were you not allowed in the inner courts? Yes. You're talking about the Temple Mount?

Temple Mount, yes. When you went and visited there. Oh, when I went to visit... Well, of course, the Temple is... The Mount is there, but the Temple isn't there at all. Now it's the Mosque of Omar. And it's a Muslim mosque that is there now.

And there's great debate as to whether it's on the same foundation or not. There's some rather startling things that have been recently proposed as to what that Temple Mount actually was. And I won't go into that now, but it's rather startling. And I don't know if it's going to hold up under scrutiny or not. But if it does, it could very well be probably the most significant archaeological breakthrough or discovery since the Dead Sea Scrolls.

But it's premature to put too much stock in it right now. But that's the middle wall of partition that Paul is talking about here when he says that he has made both one and has broken down the middle wall of partition.

[16:05] Now you've got to remember, the Jews didn't recognize that. They still had that partition there. The fact that God had broken it down theologically and doctrinally didn't register with them because they didn't accept that.

And in effect, it's reminiscent of when Christ died. Luke tells us that at the time of our Lord's death, the veil in the temple was rent.

That was a huge curtain. A very thick curtain. It wasn't just a thin veil of material. It was an interwoven thick curtain that could have been as much as six inches thick of material.

And it hung from the top to the bottom. It separated the holy place from the most holy place in the temple. The most holy place is given that name because it is the holiest of all.

It's where the Ark of the Covenant was. That was the place that only the high priest could enter once a year on the Day of Atonement. And he atoned for the sins of the people.

[17:15] And that veil, when Christ died, the veil was rent and Luke tells us from the top to the bottom. Just as if there was a giant pair of hands reached down and tore that veil in two.

And like I said, it wasn't a flimsy thin little curtain that you could tear with your hands. It was an interwoven veil that was very thick and very formidable. Don't you wonder, when you mention the crowd and so forth, there were only a few people in that who had actually read the Old, what we call the Old Testament.

Most of the people couldn't read anyway. It's sort of like the Catholics now go to the priest. That would be the same situation. Wouldn't it be? Those people would just be followers.

That's true. They wouldn't have knowledge. That's true for the most part. Well, there was, you cannot believe how much memorizing of Scripture was engaged in by the Jewish people.

And of course, all they memorized was the Old Testament. The New didn't even exist then, but they wouldn't have recognized it anyway. And yet, the Jewish people were given to memorizing vast portions of Scripture.

[18:37] And it kind of blows my mind and shames me a little bit from the standpoint of my diligence. But when you realize that 150 psalms constituted the Jewish hymnal, and they put all of those psalms to music and to cadence and to rhythm, and that's one way that they were able to reduce them to memory was by singing them.

And there were certain songs that they sang at certain times and they just kind of committed them to memory. And we all know how we teach children with music. They're ABCs, you know, A, B, C, D, E, F, G.

And when you put music to something, it's easier to remember. And yet, I still can't imagine memorizing 150 psalms. But it was not unusual for Jewish people to have all 150 psalms memorized, have them down, letter perfect.

Not terribly unusual at all. Because writing and reading was so rare that so much of it was committed to memory, and that was their best way of retaining it was just memorizing it.

So, he has broken down the middle wall of partition between us. That's between Jew and Gentile. And this is why he's going to say later, for in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile bond that is slave or free male or female.

[20:11] Now, he's not saying that those distinctions no longer exist. Sure, there are still Jews, there are still Gentiles, there are still males and there are still females, there are still slaves, and there are still free people.

But he's saying that in Christ those distinctions are obliterated. That everyone stands on the same level before the Lord because of the finished work of Christ.

And that means your worth and your value as far as God is concerned is just as great for a woman as it is for a man, for a slave, as it is for a free man, even though people did not regard it that way.

That's the way God regarded it. The point has been made that the cross of Jesus Christ is the great equalizer. Everyone stands shoulder to shoulder, same height, common ground under the cross.

The cross is the great leveler of humanity. So, there is no preference, like men are prone to give preference to one another. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain, or of two, one new man.

[21:37] What is that new man? That new man is the spiritual body of Christ. Jesus Christ is the head. So, the barriers, the distinctions are obliterated.

And there is commonality with Jew and Gentile in Christ. In fact, it isn't just Jew and Gentile, but every other barrier or distinction that you can think of that would separate us, whether it's language,

race, educational background, status in society, all of those things are obliterated.

There is that great commonality in Christ, and he regards us all as equals. There is no superiority in the body of Christ. There is no pecking order.

There is no inferiority in the body of Christ. We are very quick to establish order among ourselves, rank, privilege, everything that goes with it, because that's part and parcel of humanity and our society.

But in the body of Christ, there are no little people. There are no nobodies in the body of Christ.

[22 : 54] Everyone is a somebody. Everyone is precious and priceless having been purchased with the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Amazing. This is just amazing. Absolutely nothing like it. For to make in himself of the two, one new man.

So, making peace. peace. And the idea is that peace is achieved in the same way that as there may be enmity between people, when we are in Christ, he becomes our peace and we are one in him.

And he makes peace in the same sense that an individual is at peace with himself. in Christ there is peace with everyone.

And we still have a volition to contend with and I would say that this peace is only potential because we have a volition that sometimes will thwart the idea of men being at peace among themselves, even those who are in Christ.

[24 : 09] but the potential there is making peace, producing peace, and that he might reconcile both Jew and Gentile unto God in one body by the cross.

And let's go over to our next sheet if we may. Flip side. And having slain the enmity thereby, the mutual enmity Goodspeed says, and to kill the feud between them.

Montgomery says, on which he slew our enmity. This is Jew and Gentile being at each other. And boy, do we ever see that today big time.

But you know, if you've read the book, and I heartily recommend it, it is amazing how Christ slays the enmity between people.

And Neville Qureshi, who is one of the team members with Rabbi Zacharias now, a young man who was born and reared Muslim into a strong Muslim family and became well-educated.

[25 : 28] They sent him to medical school. He got his medical degree, became a full-fledged physician, Christian, and then he came into faith with Jesus Christ.

The title of his book, and I've circulated it and several have read it, is called Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus.

Quite a book. And he's an intellectually gifted young man, in addition to being a medical doctor with his background, now he is speaking in apologetic venues all over the country as one of the members of Ravi Zacharias' team, and this is a man who before he came to faith in Christ as a Muslim, was at enmity with Christians, with Jews, with everyone, he considered an infidel.

And if you know anything about Muslim theology, an infidel is anyone who is not a Muslim. And yet, when Nabi Qureshi came to faith in Christ, he's got a powerful testimony, when he came to faith in Christ, the barrier that separated him from Christians, from Jews, was broken down.

He is now one with the body. Only the finished work of Jesus Christ, applied to the human heart, and regeneration is capable of doing that.

[27 : 04] Men try to construct organizations and groups whereby there is commonality and they come together and there is an official association that I think is called the American Association of Christians and Jews and so on, and there is a certain amount of comedy and friendliness between them and it is to be applauded because at least they're not at each other's throat.

They're recognizing that they do have a number of things in common and yet you cannot have that ultimate commonality apart from the finished work of Christ because that is what really does the job. Nothing else does. Everything else that men have in common in trying to break down barriers between Jew and Gentile, between black and white and all the rest of it is superficial compared to what Christ does when he gets a hold of the human heart and really changes it.

There is not a superficiality there. There is a realness, a depth that is just remarkable and it cannot be accomplished by anything other than the finished work of Christ.

And he came and preached peace to you which were far off and to them that were nigh.

[28 : 33] And I think that this far off is those who were far from God as opposed to those who were near. And that barrier again is broken down.

For through him, and I might add, and only through him. Again, this brings in the exclusivity of Christ. Do you know of any other person, entity, organization, philosophy, idea that can accomplish this?

Of course not. That is why we absolutely have to insist on the exclusivity of Christ. I know that makes us seem and appear narrow, but the way is narrow.

It isn't wide. It isn't broad. It is narrow. And there is but this one way, and it is through him, and through him alone.

We both, Jew and Gentile, have access by one spirit unto the Father. Now therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God.

[29 : 57] This is an amazing thing. You know, when Saul of Tarsus became converted in Acts chapter 9, he had great difficulty convincing others that he really was now on their side.

And those who were believers, and of course they were all Jews, they were all Jews, but they were believing Jews. And when they heard that Saul of Tarsus had become one of them, their response was, yeah, right.

Yeah, sure he has. Yeah, yeah, in a pig's eye. There wasn't anybody that believed that because they all knew this guy's history. And probably some of them had maybe encountered his hostility. And they knew that this man, Saul of Tarsus, was leading the vanguard for stamping out this sect of Jews who had come to faith in Jesus. And he'd gone to the extreme of going a hundred miles out of his way, going clear up to a foreign country, to Damascus, for the express purpose of rounding up these believing Jews and bringing them back.

And you're telling me? You're telling me that he's one of us now? Oh, sure he is. Sure he is.

Nobody would believe it. I suspect they thought that he was organizing a great sting operation where he's going to get all of these Jews together and tell them that he's one of them and then at the appropriate signal he'll have all of his Gestapo henchmen pounce upon them and arrest them all.

[31 : 38] But we all know of course that was not the way it was. And there was apparently only one man, and that was Barnabas, who actually believed him.

And we don't know what all the details were about that, but I suspect that as Barnabas heard about Saul of Tarsus coming to faith, he was apparently one of few who recognized the power and ability of God to change a human heart.

And he is thinking, wow, he's one of us now? That's really something. I've got to find him. And he goes and he finds him, and he hears his testimony, and Barnabas is called the son of consolation, the son of comfort, the son of encouragement, because that's what he was.

He was an encourager. He was the one guy who was willing to put his arm around Saul of Tarsus and say, welcome, brother, welcome to the fold.

And he believed him, he encouraged him, he strengthened him, and he got Saul off on a good footing. And eventually, eventually, Barnabas was able to convince others that Saul of Tarsus is for real, and he is a fellow believer.

[33 : 15] So he's fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God. Wow, this is an enormous thing. This is the greatest, this is a description of the greatest turnaround.

in all of human history. And it is all wrapped up here in these few verses in Ephesians. Sad thing about it is, there are still so few who understand and recognize the reality of this and the implications of this.

This, fellas, this is the real basis for peace among men. This is one of many reasons why Jesus Christ is referred to as the Prince of Peace.

He came to bring peace between God and man and between man and man. And there isn't any other human being in all of human history that you can cite that has ever been capable of accomplishing a thing like this.

no one else even comes close. Amazing. Comments or questions? Anyone? Alright, let us go on.

[34 : 34] Fellow citizens, with the household of saints, on the contrary, you share citizenship. And this citizenship, of course, we are reminded when he writes to the Philippians, that our citizenship, our real registry, is in heaven.

Not on earth. Earth is a temporal abode. Don't put your roots down here too deeply, because this world is not our home.

We're just a passing through. Treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. Where citizenship is in heaven. That's where our registry is.

That's where our permanent address is. This is just temporary here on earth. Need to keep that in mind, and we need to hold our possessions lightly, because we're going to leave them all behind. Someone humorously said, I've never seen a U-Haul trailer behind a hearse, because you're not taking it with you.

[35 : 42] You know, beautiful thing though, there are some things that you can send on ahead, but there's nothing you can take with you. Someone said, there's nothing you can take with you to heaven with your children, and all the other earthly possessions and things you're all going to leave behind.

It's just remarkable. And we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, grows unto a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built together for inhabitation of God through the Spirit.

Well, we won't take time this morning to delve into those verses, but I cannot just pass over them like that because there's just too much meat in them, so we'll have to reserve that for our next session together.