

## Ephesians 2D

- Remember I started this letter explaining how our understanding of doctrine informs our behavior
  - Our outlook on life, the choices we make, the priorities we set are all driven by what we understand about our relationship with Christ
    - Knowing the doctrines of our faith develops within us an eternal perspective on this life and the one to come
    - Conversely, we can't expect to rise above worldly temptations and our own sins unless we seek that eternal perspective
  - When we see a believer caught in a worldly carnal life, it's usually because they lack this understanding
    - They may not realize all they've received by faith, how rich they truly are
    - Or they may not understand their mission on earth and the need to remain focused on serving Christ over self
    - Or perhaps they have heard these things, but whatever understanding they gained, it remained purely academic
    - They never allowed it to drive thinking and choices
  - In Chapter 1 and 2 we've studied Paul's teaching on the means of our salvation in Christ and now the meaning of our salvation
    - Last time we studied v.10 to learn we were saved for a purpose, to accomplish good works
    - And these good works were prepared by God for us to complete to the glory of Christ
    - He has prepared a buffet of good works for us to perform by His Spirit and in His name
    - He has placed opportunities before us so that we would walk in them, but the choice of whether to walk in them lies with us
- To this point Paul's teaching has centered on the spiritual life of the individual believer
  - Yet we know believers don't exist in isolation within the family of God

- By our faith, we have all received the same Spirit of God
- Therefore we are united by the Spirit into one body, scripture says
- So the works we have been called to accomplish must be corporate works, even as we accomplish our individual part
- That buffet of works was intended to be consumed “family style”
- But what if we become divided from one another in some way?
  - Then obviously we aren’t likely to work together
  - And if we fail to work together, then we won’t accomplish the works God has predestined for us to perform
  - From what Paul says next, we can see that this church was wrestling with a particular kind of division
  - It was a division centered on personal importance, on status, on a view that Jewish believers were superior to Gentile believers
- In the church, personal importance runs at odds with corporate success
  - Personal importance is an attitude of pride and it’s usually a zero-sum game
    - In order for us to win, someone else must lose
    - If we are to get the promotion, someone else must be rejected
    - If we are to get the business deal, someone else must lose it
    - We climb the ladder by stepping on those below us
  - But such an attitude is toxic in the church, and it reflects an immature understanding of Christian doctrine
    - So Paul now moves forward to explaining the importance of corporate unity in the church
    - And in particular, he is going to address the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in the church
    - Obviously, this kind of division is common for us today, but it will be an opportunity for us to understand some important doctrine which we can apply to the needs of the modern Church

**Eph. 2:11** Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands –

**Eph. 2:12** remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

- We should notice that v.11 starts with “therefore” indicating that Paul is making an application based on his prior teaching
  - In v.10 Paul said we’ve been created for good works, and now he applies that truth to the church in Ephesus
    - The first and most important work any church must perform is to live and work as one body as a witness of the love of Christ
    - In the case of Ephesus, the church seems to have been divided, and not just by their affections for the world
    - They were also divided along the lines of Jew vs. Gentile
  - Ephesus was a Greek city, but it was also part of the diaspora
    - The word diaspora means dispersion and it refers to the settlement of Jews throughout the Gentile world
    - The cities of the diaspora dotted the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, including the city of Ephesus
  - In each of these cities, a sizable contingent of Jews settled and established communities
    - They built homes, businesses and synagogues
    - They grew stronger and often became very financially successful
    - Typically, the Gentile populations of these cities grew to resent the Jews’ success, and over time prejudices grew
  - The Jews for their part didn’t help matters by their attitudes toward Gentiles
    - The Jew was taught that Gentiles were “dogs” and unworthy of God’s love
    - They said that God created Gentiles merely to fuel the fires of hell

- They had a saying that even the best of serpents still crush, and even the best of Gentiles still kill
- Paul draws his Gentile readers' attention to this separation in v.11 when he says, remember what you lacked prior to coming to faith in Christ
  - He starts by calling out those who were "Gentiles in the flesh"
    - Paul's referring to the physical mark of Jewishness, which is circumcision
    - All Jewish boys were to be circumcised or else they were excluded from the nation of Israel
    - Therefore, circumcision was symbolic of Jewish identity, and lack of circumcision was symbolic of being Gentile
  - In that sense they were Gentile in the flesh, meaning Gentile by virtue of lacking the mark of Jewishness
    - A Jew, the "circumcised," would refer to Gentiles as the "uncircumcised" and it was always an insult
    - Paul says remember you were once despised by Jews because you lacked the mark that made you part of God's family
- But then Paul adds that this mark came through human hands, referring to the way circumcision was accomplished
  - Remember, Paul just established that no one enters the family of God through a human work
    - So if circumcision is a mark in the flesh made by human hands, then it cannot be the means of salvation for anyone, whether Jew or Gentile
    - It served a purpose of uniting a group of people as one nation under a covenant
    - But it was never a substitute for faith
  - Nevertheless, it did create a separation
    - In v.12 Paul reminds his Gentile readers of all they were separated from
    - They were separated from the promises of the Messiah

- They had no knowledge of a coming Messiah nor any interest in what He offered
- Consider the magnitude of Paul's first point in v.12
  - As we studied in Genesis, in the centuries that followed the fall of Adam, God revealed Himself through a certain line of humanity; the line of the seed promise
  - And then beginning with Abraham, Issac and Jacob, the Lord revealed Himself to a nation of people
  - But apart from a few exceptions along the way, the Lord did not reveal Himself to the vast majority of humanity
- Millions of people have lived and died without ever knowing the Creator except at a distance
  - They were separated from the Messiah
  - Their separation was the result of humanity's sin
  - So Paul reminds the Gentile believers just how special it is that God has granted us an opportunity to know Christ now
- Then Paul adds that Gentiles were separated from the commonwealth of Israel
  - Commonwealth refers to the civic, religious and commercial life of the people of God
    - Gentiles had no place in Jewish society
    - Therefore they could not benefit from the supernatural success God visited upon His people
  - Over history and despite their persecution, there has never been a people more blessed than the Jewish people
    - Social studies have confirmed that Jews are overrepresented among the world's greatest scientists, musicians, artists, businessmen, politicians, etc.
    - Jews make up about 0.2% of the world's population, yet the percent of successful Jews in business, science and art is far higher
  - And the accumulative contributions of the Jewish people to the world are truly astounding

- The science that drives the technology of our life came from Jewish scientists and engineers
- Men like Einstein, Freud, Carl Sagan, Oppenheimer, Edward Teller, Jonah Salk, Niels Bohr, Max Born, Steve Ballmer, Mark Zuckerberg
- Jewish writers include Asimov, JD Salinger, Karl Marx, Ayn Rand, Norman Mailer
- And artists and actors include Harrison Ford, Woody Allen, Daniel Radcliff, Gwyneth Paltrow, Dustin Hoffman, Billy Crystal, Oliver Stone, Leonard Nimoy, William Shatner, James Caan, George Gershwin, Billy Joel, Bob Dylan, Lauren Bacall etc..
- You have Jews to thank for almost everything you touch in life
  - Do you wear Levi jeans? You have a Jew to thank
  - Do you use a Dell computer? You have a Jew to thank
  - Did you like the movie ET? Or Jaws? You have a Jew to thank
  - Do you like Hershey's chocolate? You have a Jew to thank
- What explains this higher rate of Jewish success?
  - God promised to bless the Jewish people disproportionately in the covenant He gave to Abraham
  - But the unbelieving world labels Jewish success a "conspiracy" and uses it as an excuse to persecute God's people
  - Paul calls it the commonwealth of Israel
- But Paul says we lacked these things because we were strangers to the covenants that brought them to Israel
  - The Lord accomplishes everything through His word, which He gives to men in the form of covenants, or promises
    - The Lord makes promises and gives assurance to men
    - And then by His word, He fulfills these things by His own power
    - If we are to receive the things God promises, then we must first become party to the covenant by which He promises
  - The Lord gave His promises of a Messiah and a commonwealth to Abraham and to his descendants

- Gentiles are not the natural descendants of Abraham
- Therefore, Gentiles are not members of that covenant by birth
- God later gave Israel other covenants, and we were strangers to all of them by birth
- As a result, Gentiles had no hope and were without God in the world
  - Obviously, Paul doesn't mean that Gentiles have no hope for anything
  - In a general sense, hope is merely a common human experience
  - Kids hoped for nice gifts, women hoped for a faithful husband, men hoped for a good harvest, etc.
- But Paul isn't talking about that kind of hope...he's speaking of an eternal hope, a sure and certain knowledge that our death is not the end of us
  - He's describing the unique hope that is made possible by a true knowledge of the Living God
  - It's a hope of the Creator's promise that we will live again, that we will not receive the penalty for our sin
  - That's a hope that Gentiles didn't have in days past
- God intended this separation to exist between Jew and Gentiles
  - In fact, the Lord made Israel to be a peculiar people
    - Their uniqueness separated them from the Gentiles so they might remain distinct over millennia of history
    - This separation served God's purpose in bringing the world salvation through a distinct people
    - His purpose continues even today among unsaved Jews still bound under the Old Covenant
  - And it was in the midst of this culture of separation that Christ came to inaugurate a New Covenant in His blood

**Eph. 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

- Paul says in v.13 that Jesus opened the door for Gentiles to receive the promises given to Israel
  - A New Covenant inaugurated in Christ's blood brought the Gentile "near"
    - The word near stands in stark contrast to being separated from God, far from Him and without a knowledge of Him
    - That divide was healed by Christ's suffering and death
    - And now by faith in Christ, we are brought near to God
  - Paul is revealing a mystery that he will come back to several times throughout the rest of this letter
    - Ironically, mysteries aren't things that are mysterious
    - The word mystery in the New Testament describes a hidden truth of God that He eventually reveals
    - We only know of these mysteries after they have been revealed
  - Paul was privileged to explain a total of 8 mysteries in his New Testament letters, and one of the most important mysteries is explained in this letter
    - We're talking about the mystery of the Church
    - That God intended to form a community of Gentile believers who would follow the Jewish Messiah that Israel largely rejected
    - That God would bring the Gentiles near through Christ
- As Gentiles, we are likely to take this grace for granted
  - That is, we probably overlook just how amazing it is that God has included us in the promises He gave to Israel
    - No one saw this coming...it was a mystery
    - Not even the Apostles themselves expected God to reach out to the Gentiles
    - In the book of Acts we see Peter struggling to accept that he must preach to Gentiles too
  - Yet here we are, and more than that, receiving what Israel was promised even before Israel itself is receiving it

- The covenant that has brought us near to Christ is just like all the covenants God has made
- They are covenants between God and Israel

[Jer. 31:31](#) “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, [Jer. 31:32](#) not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord.

[Jer. 31:33](#) “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

[Jer. 31:34](#) “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

- The Lord gave His New Covenant with Israel
  - The Lord says the covenant will place a “new” heart in God’s people leading them to keep His commandments
    - It’s a covenant with the power to compel righteousness
    - It’s a promise of glorification
  - Secondly, Jeremiah says that when this covenant comes to Israel, there will be none among Israel who need to be taught of the Lord
    - When it comes for Israel, all Israel will receive it
    - It’s a covenant promising to make Israel a nation of faithful, glorified followers of God
  - Obviously, Israel still awaits the fulfillment of this covenant, which will happen at the end of this age
    - Meanwhile, you and I have already received it
    - The Church precedes Israel in receiving what Israel was promised
    - God has done this to fulfill His promise to Abraham to bless all nations through the Messiah
- In the meantime the Lord is bringing this covenant to Gentiles in the Church

- By faith in Jesus Christ, we have been reconciled to God
  - The Spirit of God Who has written God's law on our heart
  - We have a hope of resurrection and a life in the Kingdom
  - And we have a life of service to Christ in the meantime
- But Gentiles are not the only ones receiving this covenant
  - While most of Israel still remains unbelieving, some are coming to faith in Jesus Christ
  - Sometimes we call them completed Jews or Messianic Jews
  - They are the remnant, those who continue the unbroken line of believing Israel
- But now that God has moved to bring Gentiles into His family, the Jewish believers in the diaspora were struggling
  - The thousands of years of separation which had previously defined the relationship of Jews and Gentiles was now working against the unity of the church
  - Many Jewish believers were slow to abandon their practices under the Old Testament Law, practices intended to foster separation from Gentiles
  - And certainly Gentile believers were not interested in adopting Jewish law as a consequence for following Christ, which ensured continuing separation
- Paul was frequently forced to defend the rights of Gentiles in the church and to rebuke the Judaizers who sought to impose Jewish law on Gentile believers
  - In fact, Paul fought this very battle in Ephesus
    - We see this reflected in Paul's letter to Timothy, who pastored in the city of Ephesus

**1Tim. 1:1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope,

**1Tim. 1:2** To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

**1Tim. 1:3** As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,

[1Tim. 1:4](#) nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.

[1Tim. 1:5](#) But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

[1Tim. 1:6](#) For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion,

[1Tim. 1:7](#) wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.

- Notice Paul asks Timothy to instruct certain troublemakers who were absorbed in Jewish distractions
- We know the false teaching being spread in Ephesus revolved around Judaizers because Paul mentions men teaching on genealogies and the Law
- Both these things are uniquely Jewish concerns
- But Paul makes clear that this false teaching has no place in the church
  - The Paul calls it strange speculation and fruitless myth
  - It's unhelpful because it attempts to perpetuate a separation that no longer, in fact, exists
  - As Paul explains

[Eph. 2:14](#) For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

[Eph. 2:15](#) by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

[Eph. 2:16](#) and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

- Paul says Christ brings peace for Jew and Gentile
  - Obviously, Christ brings us peace with the Father
    - He reconciles us to the Father having taken the Father's wrath for our sin
    - But Christ also brings peace for Jew and Gentile in the Church

- Obviously, God never expected Jew and Gentile to war with one another, but neither did He call them to unite
  - In fact, as we've already explained, the covenants of God instituted a state of separation between Jew and Gentile
  - And nothing symbolized that separation better than the wall set around the temple in Jerusalem
- God required Israel build a wall around the outer courtyard of the temple
  - While any Jew could enter into the compound, no Gentile could legally enter
  - Even a Gentile convert to Judaism was barred from entry
  - A Gentile was forever barred by the Law from entering the temple compound
  - And if a God-fearing Gentile could not approach God in the temple service, how did such a person find fellowship with God?
  - The message was clear...only Jews were offered fellowship with God under the Old Covenant Law
- We'll talk more next time about how Jesus unites Jew and Gentile into a single body
  - But today, we don't usually see Jewish believers dividing against Gentile believer, though it does happen regrettably
    - Where it happens, it happens for the same reasons it happened in the first century
    - Teachers demand that believers return to a practice of the Law
    - And by that practice, we erect a new dividing wall between members of the body
  - Our experiences with divisions in the body usually turn on much more important things...
    - Like the color of the carpet in the sanctuary
    - Or the style of music in worship
    - I'm being facetious, though not entirely

- Anytime we focus on our earthly differences rather than on our eternal union in Christ, we are at risk of erecting new dividing walls
  - It happens when we forget our place as a part of the body of Christ
  - When our individual desires and concerns become more important than the needs of others and the unity of the body, division has begun
  - When preserving our past identity becomes more important to us than living out our new identity in Christ, then we're dividing
  - When we're asking what we can get out of the body rather than asking what we can invest in the body
- We've only just begun to study Paul's teaching on the importance of unity in the body, but already we can understand that Christ wants unity
  - We've been called to serve Christ by our works within the body of the Church
    - Many of our works are individual accomplishments, of course
    - But even then, our individual works are to be directed to the needs of others in the church body
    - If we're divided one from another, the very purpose in our good works disappears
    - Christianity is a team sport
  - But when we allow our pride or ego to erect dividing walls, then we're only hurting ourselves in the long run
    - We risk denying ourselves the benefit of spiritual gifts from others in the body
    - And we deny ourselves the opportunity to serve others
    - Both are a serious spiritual loss
- As we continue through Paul's teaching on unity in the body, I want to challenge us to consider where we may be erecting barriers, whether intentional or otherwise, with other believers
  - Where are we letting things like age, money, race or other meaningless differences divide you from other Christians?

- Or do we divide too easily over differences of opinion about meaningless things?
- Are we quick to be offended and slow to forgive?
- It can happen faster than you expect, and it works against God's purposes in the Church