

## Ephesians 2E

- It's the start of a new year, and that means New Year's resolutions
  - We resolve to eat better and exercise more, to drop bad habits and start good ones
    - Many of our resolutions last about as long as champagne on New Year's Eve
    - Nevertheless, the tradition endures
    - The secret to a successful New Years resolution is to select goals that are easily achievable
  - For example, here are some of my resolutions
    - Sleep in more
    - Reduce the number of jokes in my sermons...done!
    - Share my opinions with other people more often
    - All easily achievable
  - What is it about a new year that prompts us to adopt new thoughts and new behaviors?
    - I think the enduring popularity of New Year's Resolutions is evidence of how much we desire to become something better than who we are
    - Like wiping the slate clean, we're seeking the ultimate do-over
    - And maybe we're wishing that major changes of our life can be as easy as flipping the page on a calendar
  - Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ that we have already received the ultimate do-over through our faith in Him
    - We're made new in His likeness
    - And we have an entirely new and better future ahead of us
    - And that future is closer than you think, and it's begun even now

- Because even now Christ is at work making many things new in us every day through the study of His word
- In our study of Ephesians, Paul's been explaining our spiritual do-over
  - Now at the end of Chapter 2, Paul's point is the unity of all believers made possible by our common faith in the One Redeemer
    - Paul began by reminding his largely Gentile readers how they had at one time been outside the grace of God
    - Gentiles were strangers to God and to the covenants that God gave exclusively to Israel
  - Then in v.13 Paul said "but now"
    - Now through Jesus Christ, Gentiles have opportunity to know the Living God
    - Now the message of salvation has reached our ears
    - And therefore those who were formerly far away from God have been brought near to God through the cross of Jesus Christ
  - Paul said it was as though the stone wall that barred Gentiles from entering the Jewish temple had been torn down
    - Spiritually speaking, Gentiles and Jews were no longer separated
    - Where before the Lord had revealed Himself only to the Jewish people
    - Now all people could approach Him through Jesus Christ
- Let's pick up there again in Paul's explanation

**[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.

**[Eph. 2:17](#)** and He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near;

**[Eph. 2:18](#)** for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

- Paul says our common faith in Jesus Christ destroyed a barrier between Jew and Gentile, referring to the wall around the temple
  - Before Christ, only Jewish people had opportunity to enter the temple service and worship the true God
    - The Gentile – even a Gentile who feared and worshiped Yahweh – was never permitted to enter the temple grounds
    - He or she could only worship at a distance
  - Now Paul isn't saying that Gentiles were never saved
    - We know from the Old Testament that occasionally Gentiles would come to faith and even attach themselves to Israel
    - Biblical figures like Rahab, Ruth and the Queen of Sheba were God-fearing Gentiles
    - And even entire Gentile cities like Nineveh came to faith
  - But these were the exceptions that proved the rule
    - Gentiles were largely excluded from the family of God
    - Only Jews enjoyed an abiding relationship with God through the covenants He gave to Israel
    - Chief among those covenants was the Mosaic Covenant, which defined Israel as God's people and gave them God's Law
- The Law was the principle cause of Israel's separation from the Gentile nations
  - The Law compelled Israel to live a unique lifestyle
    - The Jews were to dress, eat, and otherwise live very differently than their Gentile neighbors
    - The law of commandments and ordinances was specifically intended to create division between Israel and the Gentiles
  - And over time those ordinances enflamed the passions of the flesh leading to enmity between Jew and Gentile
    - The Jewish people became haughty and prideful toward Gentiles
    - Their special relationship with Yahweh gave Jews excuse to look down on Gentiles, to despise them, to mistreat them

- Meanwhile, Gentiles saw Jews as a strange and isolated people who enjoyed an unexpected prosperity
  - So in jealousy Gentiles persecuted Jews seeking to take their prosperity for themselves
  - In that sense, Paul says the commandments of the Law resulted in enmity between the two groups
  - God wasn't to blame for their sinful responses to the Law
  - Nevertheless, as long as the Law held true for Jews, it fostered separation and the enmity that resulted
- Meanwhile, the one ironic similarity between Jew and Gentile was their sinful condition
  - Both Jew and Gentile were separated from God because of sin
  - Both experienced enmity with God even as they had enmity with each other
  - The Jews thought themselves superior because they had the Law, but it was the Law of God that condemned them for their sin
  - While the Gentiles thought themselves better because they didn't live in such strange ways, yet their godless lifestyle left them with no hope
- But all that changed when the promised Messiah came to Israel and the world
  - Paul says in v.15 that by His "flesh" Christ "abolished" the enmity that existed between these two groups
    - Obviously, hatred between Jew and Gentile didn't disappear the moment Jesus appeared
    - So how did Christ abolish the hatred that marked the relationship between Jew and Gentile?
    - The answer is that Jesus' flesh brought the Law of commandments to an end
    - And it was that law that prompted the division and enmity
  - The Law of Moses demanded Israel live according to certain standards

- If Israel met those terms, then the Law also promised that the nation would know prosperity and security in their land
- Which was a veiled reference to Israel receiving the Kingdom
- But if Israel failed to live according to the standards of the Law, the covenant required that Israel receive severe penalties
  - The Law was unforgiving...it offered no escape from its demands
  - And no sinful human being could ever meet its terms
- That's why the Son of God, Jesus Christ, took on flesh to live as a man
  - He came to live an earthly life that the Law demanded
    - He never sinned, scripture testifies, therefore Jesus met the Law's requirements for righteousness
    - And by His perfect life He is deserving of the Kingdom that the Law promises
  - But Jesus went a step further...
    - Though He hadn't disobeyed the Law Himself, nevertheless Jesus died as the Law required
    - He paid the Law's price for sin
    - Therefore, Jesus fulfilled or complete the Law's requirements for righteousness and for sin
    - As Jesus Himself declared to the Pharisees in Matthew 5:

**Matt. 5:17** "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

**Matt. 5:18** "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

- Jesus said His very purpose in coming to Earth was to *fulfill* that Law
  - To fulfill means to complete, so Jesus was saying He came to complete the Law by meeting all its requirements
  - Completing it for righteousness' sake meant living according to its exacting standards, which Jesus did

- But completing the Law for *our* sake meant paying the price the Law required for our sin, which He also did
- Once everything required in the Law has been accomplished in Jesus' life and death (i.e., by His flesh), then the Law was fulfilled
- By Jesus fulfilling the Law in this way, it means the Law is no longer in effect for those who believe
  - As a Jew or Gentile places his or her trust in Christ, the believer is credited Jesus' work of meeting the Law's requirements
    - By our faith, the Law comes to an end
    - As Paul says in Romans;

**Rom. 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**

- It's because the Law has come to an end for believers that Paul says Jesus abolished enmity
  - Jesus did away with the cause of that enmity, namely the divisions created by the Law itself
  - There is no dividing wall between the two groups
  - In fact, there is no need for a temple at all, nor sacrifice, nor any of the practices of the Law
  - The source of our division was ended because it was completed on our behalf
- What's more, the end of the Law meant the end of our enmity with God
  - The Law was the source of our condemnation
  - It was the Law of God that convicted us for our sin
  - And it was the Law that specified the penalty for sin, which is death
  - But since Christ fulfilled the Law on our behalf, we no longer stand condemned
- Paul says in vs. 15-16 that the Lord intended His work of redemption to make Jews and Gentiles one new man
  - New refers to the change that comes to every believer

- When faith in Jesus comes, both Jew and Gentile receive a new spirit and enter a new life freed from condemnation and law
- Both have changed yet neither has an advantage
- Neither can turn to the other and claim that he had something the other lacked
- They both required salvation and both have received it by faith
- They are one man in the sense that they both stand before God as equals with the same identity in Christ
  - Moreover, both have been reconciled into one body or gathering
  - Where before each group congregated separately, now they are united as one
  - No further division, no further enmity
- Notice in vs.17 Paul quotes from Isaiah 57 where the prophet foretold that the Messiah's work would include uniting Jew and Gentile
  - He would preach the Good News to those who were near God, that is the Jews who could approach God's glory in the temple
    - And yet it was always God's desire to preach to those who were far, to the Gentile nations
    - Here we see that Scripture acknowledges both Israel's pre-eminence among nations and the equality of Jew and Gentile in the Church
  - Israel as a nation will always have a special place in the world as God has promised
    - But that distinction is not observed on a personal level within the Church
    - A Jewish believer remains a member of the nation of Israel
    - But within the body, the distinctions of Jew or Gentile has no relevance because we find our way to the Father the same way
  - We live in a very different world than the one Paul knew
    - The church today is virtually 100% Gentile, though there remains a Jewish remnant

- You can still find churches today placing undue importance on Jewish background, traditions or even on practicing the Law itself
- But the Bible is abundantly clear that Jewishness offers no advantage within the body of Christ
- And therefore, we ought not waste time on it...let it go
- Instead, like a resolution, let's focus on what's new

[Eph. 2:19](#) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,  
[Eph. 2:20](#) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,  
[Eph. 2:21](#) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,  
[Eph. 2:22](#) in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

- As Gentiles we need not hang our heads or think ourselves second-class citizens in the body of Christ
  - On the contrary, we are no longer strangers and aliens
    - Those two terms are found in the Law
    - The Law often spoke of foreigners or strangers among God's people, referring to the Gentiles
  - It labeled Gentiles as lesser followers of God
    - Gentiles could associate with Israel, participate in the feasts, worship Yahweh
    - But they were always outsiders
    - Gentiles never forgot they were strangers and aliens among God's chosen people
  - But we are no longer to be considered strangers or outsiders in the body of Christ
    - We are fellow citizens with all saints, both Old Testament and New Testament
    - All those of faith in Jesus Christ are equal, made so by their faith in the work of Christ

- Paul says we are as privileged as the one born in the household of the master
  - In the days before Christ, a God-fearing Gentile could convert to Judaism but that didn't make the person Jewish
  - A Gentile could never become Jewish, since Jewishness is by birth only
  - The best a Gentile could hope for was to be permitted to remain among God's people for a time, called a sojourner
  - But today by faith we are considered members of the household with full privileges
- Paul ends the chapter with another analogy, speaking of believers in the church like the stones in a building
  - He begins his rhetorical construction project with the most important part of any building: the foundation
    - Paul says the church body's foundation was built by the apostles and prophets
    - Paul is referring to the word of God delivered by these men
    - The prophets of the Old Testament and the prophets of the New Testament, called apostles, delivered the word of God to the world
  - The word of God is the authority for all we believe and do as a body
    - And of course, at the cornerstone of that foundation is Jesus Christ Himself, Who established the church in His blood
    - Christ is both the subject of the word and the Deliverer of that word through His Spirit
    - And therefore the church, the body of believers, ceases to have authority or purpose without the word of God
  - Since the word of God is the church's foundation, then like any building, if our foundation is faulty, the whole structure will falter
    - A church damages its foundation at its own peril
    - If a church body compromises on the authority of the word of God, then its downfall is only a matter of time

- And compromises come in many forms...
  - It usually begins by denying the literal interpretation of scripture
  - Instead of being taught that the text means what it says, we're taught creative and false views
  - And chasing after faddish interpretations becomes a goal in itself leading the church into many foolish beliefs and practices
- The final step – and one that usually comes quickly – is the church abandoning the teaching of the word altogether
  - Today it's easy to find many churches at this point
  - Many church bodies meet under the banner of Christ but not under the authority of His word
  - We're not saying those gatherings lack true believers
  - We're saying those believers lack the truth they've gathered to hear
- If a church body is to remain true to its Master, it must forever submit to the word of God and never grow weary of studying and following it
  - As Peter said

**1Pet. 2:2** like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

- Next Paul says we, the believers, are the building, so as we know the church is not the building but the people in the church
  - But notice also Paul emphasizes we have been “fitted together”
    - The word in Greek refers to the way stone masons worked the surface of adjoining stones to create a seamless joint
    - Paul says we're not just haphazard stacks of stones that happened to come together by chance and circumstances
    - On the contrary, Paul says we were fitted together precisely by our Father, the Master Stone Mason
  - First and foremost, Paul is referring to the larger body of Christ

- When all is said and done, the total population of God's people will show itself to be a perfectly fitted group of humanity that serves God's purposes perfectly
- Not a single person will be superfluous to God's plan for the Kingdom, nor will a need go unmet
- The Lord will have exactly the number of people He needs to staff His government
- But each of us occupies a particular place on earth and time within history by God's design
  - Therefore, we know Paul was also speaking of our place in our local church
  - In other words, we are not participating in this local church by chance
  - I'm here for a reason, you're here for a reason, the Father fit us together precisely
  - He fitted you and me so that we would slide right into place here and serve a unique purpose
- This fact reminds us that we shouldn't take our participation in a local body of Christians for granted
  - First and foremost, we shouldn't neglect gathering together, as Hebrews reminds us
    - Imagine a wall constructed by God with each stone carefully selected to complete the mosaic
    - And now imagine if a few of the stones were taken out
    - They decided to stay home on Sunday...what would happen to that wall?
  - In the beginning, it's mostly a matter of appearances
    - The integrity of the wall hasn't weakened, but it doesn't look right with those holes
    - Instead of admiring the whole construction as God intended, our attention is naturally drawn to what's missing

- Like a church that misses key areas of leadership or volunteers or funds or other essential needs
- We may have 95% of what we need to glorify God as He intended, but it's those few missing pieces that get our attention
- It reminds us how important every piece is in God's plan for the church
- But as more stones go missing, the wall's very survival becomes at risk
  - I'm not talking about the failure of the Church Universal, of course
    - Christ is the One Who builds and leads His church
    - And He said the gates of Hell will not prevail against it
    - I'm speaking about the health and continuation of a local congregation, the place where our individual service takes place
  - We know the body of Christ is much more than a once-a-week gathering, but that weekly gathering is of primary importance to spiritual health of every member
    - If believers drift away from the gathering where God has placed them, they will suffer spiritually in the end
    - Or even if a member of the body falls away from corporate church attendance in favor of private personal study or smaller groups, that stone has gone missing
    - In order for stones to be fitted to one another, they have to touch one another
    - And in order for each of us to play our appointed roles in the body of Christ, we have to gather together with one another in the place God has fitted us
  - But of course, there is a time to enter into a new fellowship and there comes a time to move on
    - We should leave just as we enter...obediently following the call of God and doing so with joy
    - If we leave a church in protest, we may be running away from an important lesson God wanted to teach us

- We need to feel equal conviction when we part from a church as we did when we joined
- Secondly, Paul's analogy reminds us that each of us have a unique contribution to make to the body where we meet
  - As a mason shaped a stone, he took into consideration the shape of the stones on either side
    - The new stone was shaped to fit in that space perfectly
    - In the process, the mason had to cut some of the stone away to shape it properly
    - He must strike the stone carefully, knocking off the rough points, throwing off sparks in the process
    - But at the end of that process, the stone emerges smooth and matched to its place in the wall
  - That's a great picture of how sanctification within the body of Christ works
    - When we come together with God's people, we show up with some rough edges
    - Our personality, our habits and our sins must be reshaped by our Stone Mason, the Holy Spirit, who chisels us by the word of God
    - Which reminds us why the church must remain committed to hearing the word of God taught
    - It's the sword in the hand of the Spirit to do His work on our hearts
  - That process can be painful at times, and it may throw off some sparks
    - Sparks of personal conflict, sparks of hurt feelings, sparks of wounded egos, sparks of conviction
    - But if we give the process time and if we remain dedicated to filling our place in God's building, then we'll see the fruit eventually
    - We'll find ourselves slipping into our place and as that mosaic is completed, we'll see the value of our place in time

- We are God's building, and the mortar holding us together is the Holy Spirit Paul says in v.22
  - This is God's construction project and we are His materials
    - You may feel your participation here doesn't matter much
    - But if that's your attitude, then you're selling the Lord short
    - You're forgetting the Lord delights to show Himself strong in our weaknesses
    - You're overlooking His sovereign choice to save you and to bring you here
  - Allow me to propose our collective New Year's resolution
    - We resolve to serve the Lord in the New Year
    - We resolve to serve Him in our appointed role above serving ourself
    - We resolve to make the gathering a priority
    - We resolve to come prepared to worship, pray, study and serve others with all the energy, joy and persistence we know Christ desires
    - We resolve to be patient with the "rocks" around us, most of all the hardheaded pastor
    - And we resolve to do everything with an attitude of love