

Ephesians 2:11-22 FEFC

The New Covenant

READ THE TEXT

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— 12remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

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

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this study in Ephesians we have seen a repeated theme of unity. Jew and non-Jews have been brought together in the church. The rest of chapter 2 and most of chapter three deal with this subject. God has made one people out of two people. Today we will see why this theme was such a big deal to Paul.

Ephesians 2

Jew and Gentile Reconciled Through Christ

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—

12remember that at that time you were separate from

Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

There are a few terms that are important to understand. The first is circumcision. I think you all know what that is. Parents explain it to your kids later. The purpose of circumcision was to mark those who were God's people. It was a symbol of their separation from the nations around them. Its meaning is similar to a tattoo that marks you as belonging to a group of people.

The second term that must be understood is the term "covenant."

THE YOUNG MAN MEETS GOD

There once was a young man who lived in a very dark place. All round him people were worshipping false gods and participating in astrology and the occult. But he was a very clever man and concentrated on raising livestock and multiplying his herds. Eventually because of his hard work and clever deal making he ended up to be a pretty wealthy man.

One day as he was walking around his livestock yard he became frozen with surprise as a voice from heaven spoke to him seemingly out of thin air and at the same directly into his heart. He looked around and could see no one. Again the voice spoke to him. And then the voice introduced him-self stating that He was the one true God who created the universe. Unlike the words of the fortune tellers and their so called spirit guides, this voice spoke with great authority that shook this young man to the core.

The maker of heaven and earth told this young man that he had been chosen. God was going to give him a huge stretch of land. All he had to do was go and take it.

The young man's thoughts turned to the land that God had told him to go and take over. He knew there were a lot of very violent people in that land. He could imagine moving into the land and taking it over and the ensuing fights that could take place. He could see himself taking an arrow or a knife in the ribs. The thought brought a shiver down his spine.

His fear and his faith were in a struggle. He was

asked by God to take on a task that would strike fear into the heart of any man. On the other hand, the God of all creation was speaking to him. How powerful must this God be in order to create all that land, hills, sky and seas? If he was sure that this God whom had spoken to him would be with him, and if this God would promise to fight for him then he determined he would obey.

He went to a field in the back of his property where no one would interrupt him and he called on God. God appeared again to the young man. The young man said to God, "I will go and take this land but how will I know for sure that you will be with me and you will stop those who will want to kill me when I move in and take their land, which you have given over to me?"

God said, "I will make a covenant agreement with you." "It will be just like the covenants that your neighbors made with the prince of the territory. When your neighbor was attacked his cattle were stolen by the land owner from the south, he went to the prince of the territory and signed over his land. It was agreed that he would stay on the land

and have a place to live and work. And he could keep his crops and animals if he would give 20 percent of each to the prince. They signed a document and they read it out loud each year to renew it. And the penalty for breaking the covenant was written in the document. Finally, each of them put blood on their hands and when they touched blood together the covenant was sealed forever. Then the prince said to your neighbor; “now your enemies are my enemies.” And if anyone rides against your neighbor they will get the prince's army riding up to their own house and they will get wiped out.

God said to the young man, that is the type of covenant I will make with you so that you will have confidence to do what I am calling you to do. Now go get the animals for the blood covenant and bring them back here, I will do the rest.

So the young man named Abraham obeyed and believed that God would be with him. His faith in God put him in tight with God. God made a covenant promise that day to give Abraham;

1. Land, 2. Kids 3. Protection from his enemies

Abraham was expected to:

1. Have all the males of his family circumcised, 2. He was to obey God, 3. He was to take the land God had given him so that God would have a nation of people that God could use to become famous in all the world.

Later, the covenant would be updated by God through Abraham's relative Moses with a lot more detail. Since God was the one that came up with the covenant he was about to update the covenant from time to time. Each time the covenant was updated there would be another blood covenant to seal the deal.

The last thing to remember is that this covenant that God made with Abraham and renewed and updated through Moses and others was for Jews only. This covenant was not for people outside of Abraham's family.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

The words; "but now" means something has changed.

There is a great contrast. Those who were far from God are now brought near to God through Jesus Christ by His blood.

WHAT ABOUT THE BLOOD?

What is the big deal about blood? ***Hebrews 9:22*** makes it clear that ***“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*** Leviticus 17 tells us that forgiveness of sins was granted in Old Testament times on the basis of the shedding of an animal’s blood. At the time of their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites were spared from the plague of death by killing a lamb with no defects and then placing the blood on the door frames of their homes. In killing the lamb, the Israelites shed innocent blood. The lamb was sacrificed as a substitute for the person who would have died that night.

How then does blood take care of sin? Leviticus 4 tells us The Old Testament believers symbolically transferred their sins to an animal, which they then sacrificed. The animal died in their place to pay for their sin and to allow them to continue living in God’s favor. God covered over their sins because of their faith in him and because they obeyed his commandments concerning the sacrifice.

Those sacrifices looked ahead to the day when Jesus

Christ would completely remove sin. Permanent cleansing from sin came with Jesus. ***John 1:29 calls Jesus the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”***

Jesus became the final sacrifice for sin. Instead of an unblemished lamb slain on the altar, the perfect Lamb of God was slain on the cross, a sinless sacrifice so that our sins could be forgiven once and for all.

1 Peter 1:18-19 says; “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

The blood of Christ represents the new covenant that God made. 1 Corinthians 11 tells us that the cup in communion represents the blood of Jesus Christ. And it is called the cup of the covenant. With His death and resurrection and His blood offering on the cross Jesus updated the Old Testament covenants given to Abraham and Moses.

THE UPDATED COVENANT

Here is what got updated when Jesus upgraded the

covenant of Abraham and Moses with his blood covenant on the cross.

1. You no longer have to be born Jewish to be under the blessings of the covenant and promises of God.
2. No more blood sacrifices are needed. All we need is to rely on the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and our sins are transferred to Jesus Christ the Lamb of God and his blood sacrifice pays for our sin.
3. Nationalism is gone. Now Jesus is building the kingdom of God instead of the kingdom of men.
4. There are three aspects of the Old Testament Law. Two of them have been fulfilled and no longer necessary. The civil law is no longer connected to the church. And the temple and ceremonial laws are no longer needed. All of the ceremonies such as animal sacrifices pointed to Jesus Christ and now they are not necessary. Only the moral law is still intact. (the moral law is conduct such as stealing or killing)

OPEN COVENANT WAS UNHEARD OF

This new covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus

Christ is open to anyone who wants to join. Usually when a covenant was made it involved two parties and the names of the two parties were written right into the document. No one else's name could be added to the covenant. But the new covenant has God's signature in the blood of Jesus, and there are a long list of blank spaces where you can sign your name. The covenant of salvation is open to anyone who wants to transfer their sins to the Lamb of God and enter the covenant of faith in Jesus Christ. And you can be Jew or Gentile to be part of this new covenant community called the church of Jesus Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

THE WALL AND THE SIGN

This barrier wall of hostility is a reference to an actual wall that stood between the court of women and the court of the gentiles in the Old Testament temple. Archeology confirms that there was a sign in both Greek and Latin

which stated to anyone not Jewish that they could not walk past the wall to get any closer to the inner sanctuary.

There was actually a death penalty for any Gentile who went beyond this wall. So how did Jesus get rid of the wall of hostility?

15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.

There were 613 laws and regulations that were part of the Old Covenant that God made with Abraham and expounded on through Moses. He set aside all of those rules by updating the covenant through Jesus Christ.

15 cont..His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and

also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

THE CORNERSTONE

In this passage the cornerstone is a reference to a large stone that is set at the corner of a roof and it keeps two walls from falling down by locking them together. This is like a very powerful top plate in construction that locks two walls into place by overlapping. I believe one wall represents Jews who came to faith through the Messiah and the abutting wall represents non-Jews that came to faith. Jesus Christ joins them together and makes one building out of us.

The foundation is the apostles because they were assigned to establish and expand the church through the gospel. They planted the first churches. So Jesus torn down walls of hostility between two people groups and then the apostles were called to organize them together in churches.

21 In him the whole building is joined together and

risers to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The words; “In him the whole building is joined together” builds on the idea that Jesus Christ is taking two very different types of people and just like joining a front wall to a side wall, he is the top plate or cornerstone that hold those two different walls together keeping them from falling or wobbling. And they are part of the exact same building, the church of Jesus Christ.

WE ARE DIFFERENT BUT TOGETHER

We’re Different

It is obvious that we are different in many ways. There are many different nationalities represented here. And some of you are pretty well off and others have to dig change out of the couch cushions to buy a box of macaroni and cheese.

Some of you were popular in school and friends came easy while some of you feel awkward around others and know what to talk about.

I would go so far as to say that many of us do not have a

lot in common and the only reason we know one another is because Jesus brought us together. You see, Jesus has torn down walls between people. When God puts His love in your heart for someone that you would not normally hang around with and do not have much in common with that is a miracle and an act of God.

When we forget ourselves and act in the flesh and do not walk in the Spirit of God then all of our difference come rushing back and we once again divide ourselves into human difference and put up dividing walls between ourselves.

That God tears down dividing walls of hostility between us and between those we seek to reach with the gospel is a miracle of God.

Our salvation covenant through the blood of Jesus Christ is all about tearing down walls, not building them us. Part of our salvation covenant is that God puts His love in our hearts so that we can love God and we can love one another and look out not for our own interests but for the interests of others.

If we fail to love others then we are building dividing walls that Christ tore down. If we fail to forgive others then we are building walls of hostility that Jesus Christ died to tear down. If we fight and demand our personal preferences in matters of style and methods of doing things in the church, then we build walls that Christ tore down.

As Ronald Reagan once said; “tear down that wall.” Forgive, love without strings and don’t let preferences divide us. We have to have differences because Jesus reached across every line to pull different people together into the same church and into His own body. That is the miracle. So expect differences and expect to see things that apart from Christ would divide us except that to the glory of Jesus Christ we are made one in Christ.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Philippians 2:3-5 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better

than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

James 5:9 Don 't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

1 John 3:23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Do you understand that our salvation is part of a blood covenant with Jesus Christ?
2. Have you ever by faith transferred your sins to the Lamb of God and asked Him to forgive your sins and give you the new life that is offered in Jesus Christ?
3. Have you built walls between yourself and another person that Jesus himself wants to tear down?
4. How are you working to tear down walls of hostility with others in the church and with the lost in our community?

