

The New Humanity (Ephesians 2:12-22)

Introduction

It is the cross that brings us together. The cross is the rallying point of Christianity. The cross shows all of us to be guilty. It puts all men on equal footing. We are all sinners. Someone has said that the cross brings us back to our senses. It brings us back to the place of love where reconciliation takes place. We look at the cross and we are reminded of what we have lost. We look at the cross and we are reminded that we are responsible. It is the cross that reminds us that we are not nearly as good as we thought. It is the cross that reminds us that we are sick. It reminds us that the rot of humanity resides in us. It is the cross that brings us to repentance. It causes us to open up to God. It is the cross that reminds us our Father will restore us.

1. The Cross brings us near to God.

A. Paul addresses the Gentile Christians.

1. Once they were far off. They were not accepted by Jewish Christians. The Jews referred to the Gentiles as "the uncircumcision." They alone were loved by God. Some believed that all others "were fuel for the fire of hell."
2. The Jewish Temple represented the feelings of the Jews toward the Gentiles. Court of the Gentiles, court of women, court of the Israelites, court of the priests and the Holy of Holies. Only the chief priest could enter the Holy of Holies and only once each year. There were signs posted in Latin and Greek warning that death would come to any Gentile who went beyond the court of the Gentiles.

B. The blood of Christ breaks down barriers.

1. The barrier between Jew and Gentile was abolished by Christ. The curtain isolating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.
2. Those who were once "far off" and "those near" are reconciled. They are brought into one body by the cross. The Gentiles were given access by the Spirit to the Father. This didn't excite the Jews. The barriers are broken down.

2. Christ brings peace.

A. He is our peace.

Isaiah 57:19 "Peace, peace to him who is far away and to him who is near," Says the LORD."

Originally this referred to the Jews in dispersion and Jews in Palestine. Now Paul says this refers to the Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles are brought near to God through Christ. "He is our peace." Christ died for the Jew and the Gentile, bringing them into union with Himself.

B. One body by the cross. ("so that in Himself He might make the two one new person" (15)) In Christ barriers are broken down (race, class, sex, religion). What does that say to those of us who still struggle with our prejudices? Little by little Christ breaks down the walls.

Illustration--In 1963, George C. Wallace, governor of Alabama, literally stood in the door of the University of Alabama, preventing Vivian Malone Jones, a black woman, from enrolling as a student. Thirty-three years later, Wallace awarded Jones the first Lurleen B. Wallace Award of Courage. The award named in honor of Wallace's wife, recognizes women who have made outstanding contributions to the state of Alabama. Wallace publicly apologized to Jones for the 1963 controversy; Jones in turn forgave Wallace. It was a true moment of reconciliation and redemption.

C. The church is not an organization but a new humanity in Christ. The church is the incarnation of Christ. We are Christ to the world. The cross is the only means of reconciliation and redemption.

D. Access by one Spirit to the Father.

1. Access--free approach into the presence of a king.

Illustration--In Persian royal courts there was an official called the *prosagoge*. His function was to introduce people who desired an audience with the King.

2. The image for Gentile believers is obvious. Through Christ we have open access to the Father. On the cross, Jesus flung the door wide open. In fact, he nailed it open never to be closed again. Paul had been accused of taking a Gentile into the Temple. He was falsely charged, arrested and imprisoned (Acts 21:28). Here Paul makes it clear that the Gentile believers have open access to the Father.

3. No longer strangers/Images of the Church. (19-22)

A. They are not foreigners or aliens.

1. It was possible in theory for a Gentile to become a naturalized member of the Jewish state by adopting the Jewish religion. But in actual practice, he was never received as a full son of Abraham. His birth was always held against him.
2. Members of the household of God. The church is the household of God, a family. The Gentiles previously had no privileges. Now they are brought into the intimate family circle.

B. The Church is the building of God.

1. Not a building built with hands. It is a building built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles (2:20). Each believer is a brick in the building. Each is important.
2. Christ is the Cornerstone (2:20). He is the stone that holds the building together. He gives unity to the entire structure. The building is still in process. It is a long term process. Every time a new convert trusts in Christ for salvation, a new stone is added. The building grows as the body is built (4:16).

C. It is the Habitation of God.

Verse 22 "in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit."

1. No longer outcasts, Gentiles are now part of the Temple. God dwells in them. He has His presence in them. God's people is the dwelling place of God. (Rev. 21:3; 1 Peter 2:5)
2. God is not restricted to a ritual or a Temple, a law or a doctrinal system. Jesus told the Samaritan woman, "Believe Me, woman, that a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem." (Jn. 4:21).
3. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (Jn. 2:19)

We are the habitation of God. He has redeemed us to be a new humanity in whom His life is expressed in the world. Jesus wants to live out His life through you. Let others see Jesus in you.