

## Ephesians 2:11-22

### *Two Are Now One*

Paul is changing his focus. He still compares *WHAT WAS* with *WHAT IS*, but he is going to take us from the heavenly realm and bring us down to earth. He is going to focus on the Cross where Jesus died, where before he focused on the place of Glory where Jesus is seated and never mentioned the Cross. After the focus on the cross Paul talks about a New Temple, not a place in heaven, but a Temple that exists on the earth today. The Jewish Temple, in Jerusalem, had an altar of atonement right outside the Temple door, as if pointing the way into it. And inside the Temple was the dwelling place of the Shekinah Glory—which to the Jew meant “*God dwelling among His people.*” The Jews believed, and many Jews still believe, that the Temple Building was the merging of heaven and earth, much like heaven and earth merged together in the Garden of Eden. In the Garden man was at peace with God. Through the Temple man could again find peace with God. But it was not permanent peace. But Jesus has come! Through Him we can have permanent peace with God, a peace far more extensive and miraculous. It breaks the barriers and ends hostilities on all sides. Paul does not mention our personal sins directly here, but deals with sin on a much larger level, on a world-wide scale. He looks beyond individuals and tells us how Christ can bring enemies together. And this is not just a truce, a kind of peaceful co-existence, but this is a union, a partnership. And where does this take place? In the New Temple: The Church. “*In the past, you were separated and without hope and without God ... But NOW, in Christ...*” A hopeless situation is made new. That is the essence of Eph 2:11-22.

**Eph 2:11-22** (ESV) *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

So there are two questions:

How does remembering what we *WERE* help us experience what we *ARE*?

How does understanding God's Temple affect our view of the world?

*How does remembering what we WERE help us experience what we ARE?*

Paul said in 2:1 "You were dead..." and he made it clear he was not just talking to Gentiles but to Jews as well. All are dead in sin. He is talking about Gentiles again in 2:11-12, and essentially says, "Remember that you were at that time, separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." What he says is an excellent definition of what "living death" really is, and what it was like for us who were lost in the world. The problem is, when we ARE lost very few of us KNOW we are lost. This is true for all people, even the most religious of us. And if you are of the male gender, even if you know you are lost, you will not admit. Ask any wife who has seen her husband get lost driving to a new destination. One time, when Sheri and I lived in California, we were getting ready to go out for the evening. She said we have to leave by 5:00, knowing the event was not until 7:00. I protested saying we did not have to leave TWO hours early! To which she said, "We have to find a place to eat on the way, then a place to park, and time for you to get lost because you won't ask for directions." She had spent too much time "having no hope" of ever getting to our destination on the freeways of L.A.

So Paul wants the Ephesians to remember what they were. He has just told them they are raised up with Christ and sitting with him in the heavenly realms. That kind of information can go to your head! Paul wants to warn them. He says to remember where they came from. This is the same thing Moses told Israel before they went in to take possession of Canaan. *Ex 23:9 "You shall not oppress a foreigner. You know the heart of a foreigner, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt."* And in *Deut 10:19 "Love the foreigner, therefore, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt."* See? Moses is saying, "You were foreigners, strangers in Egypt. You know the heart of a foreigner. Don't treat them the way you were treated." Paul is saying the same thing to the mostly Gentile church in Ephesus. Do not forget what it is like to be without God and without hope, just as he warned before when he said, "No one can boast! We do not save ourselves." (2:9) It is so easy for us to think the freedom we have in the Christian life as something we achieve. Christians can look out on those who are still separated from Christ and see them only as the "godless pagans." There are so many ways we can become proud; our high moral ground, or our special doctrines we hold as the distinctives that make us different (and therefore "better") than others. We can find ourselves in a position where our morals are so high and our distinctions so ingrained that we cannot get along with anyone. The entire world outside of our little tribe becomes hostile, and we are trapped behind a wall of separation. Do we serve the world, or are we in this world only to protect ourselves? Have we forgotten the experience and the joy of being "in Christ" in the world, of being Christians who are lights in a dark place?

When we read the Gospels we often get a glimpse of the joy Jesus expressed as He served others in His preaching, teaching and healing ministries. Was His work always pleasant? Of course not. It seems He was always in conflict with someone. But at times He would burst forth in praise for what his followers were seeing and learning. Luke says, "He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children'" (Luk 10:21). Jesus rejoiced in them! The Pharisees

never had this joy, this rejoicing attitude. Why? They were in the flesh. They had all the rules down, they believed the right doctrines, they were all circumcised, but they were still in living in the realm of the flesh. This is really Paul's point when he said in 2:12 *You Gentiles in the flesh—who were called uncircumcised by the circumcised in the flesh (done by human hands)*" See the common phrase, "*In the flesh...*"? The Jews who looked down on Gentiles? They still live *in the flesh!* The only difference between them and the Gentiles they despised? They have a mark on their bodies. And Paul points out that the mark they hold so dear is made by their own hand, which is what the Jews said about the Gentile gods. They were made by human hands. I am sure Paul remembers Moses in *Deut 10:16 "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn."* Moses told them this right before he told them to "*Love the foreigner in your midst...*" *Deut 10:19.* Moses knew it was impossible to love the foreigner if the heart was not radically changed. That was true for them, it is true for us. The pride of the Jews was their circumcision. Our pride may lie somewhere else: our jobs, our bank account, our fame, our education. These are all good things! The problem is, none of them will last. But circumcision of the heart? That is forever!

*How does remembering what we WERE help us experience what we ARE?*

Paul turns from the past when he says, "*But NOW...*" and he takes us to the cross of Christ. But Paul does not mention sin. He is looking at something far greater. He is using the conflict between the Jewish and the Gentiles worlds as a test case. A test case to portray the plight of the entire world. There is an endless cycle of political and military conflicts around the world, in our cities there is segregation and suspicion, in our families there is division and pain. Hatred and resentment begets further isolation and division.<sup>1</sup> Paul said in 2:1-3 that all men are dead in sin, but here he says our entire world culture is locked in a death spiral, separated from the love and grace of the true and living God. And Jesus has come to make it right—to make peace, not only between God and man, but between man and man. *How do we experience this—NOW, Today?* Through the cross of Christ, the Cross where God changes the hearts of Jews and Gentiles. Paul tells us in 2:13-18 about the peace we can experience as followers of Jesus. Where before it said we were far away, now v.13 "*we have been brought near by the blood of Christ*", by His sacrificial atoning death on the cross. This is true because v.14 says "*Christ Himself IS our peace by making Jews and Gentiles one people, His body has broken down the barrier between them,*" then in v.15 "*He abolished (brought an end to) the Jewish Law.*" As soon as Jesus died that day on Calvary, the Temple veil spilt wide open. This ended the Jewish Temple sacrificial system as far as God was concerned. Jesus was the final sacrifice and He opened the way. Paul goes on to say in v.15 "*He did this to create out of two races, one new race in Himself, and this is how He MADE peace.*" This is a great insight for us because God starts the new race "*IN Himself!*" That means the race begins with Jesus as the Head, but Jesus is also one of three in God, and God existed from all of eternity. This means the Trinity is the starting point of this new race. We are part of *THAT* race—in the very heart of the Trinity! Paul goes on: v.16 "*The cross destroyed the hatred (the enmity) between them (not just Jews and Gentiles, but all men, all warring nations), ended the hostility and through the cross brought men back to God.*" v.17 *Christ PREACHED peace to ALL, near and far, Jews and Gentiles, v.18 and through Christ we all have access to the Father.* And this access to the Father means we **pros-agago ... pros ton patera** "*We enter the presence (literally, before the face) in One Spirit with the Father*" The preposition **pros** means "*with*" but "*with*" in the sense of a face to face

relationship. This is marvelous! We have *FACETIME* with the Father and Creator of the universe anytime we want it! We have full access because of Jesus—with no reservation needed! Jesus has had this same kind of relationship with the Father from all eternity: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was **with** God (**pros ton theos**), and the Word was God. Jn 1:1* John says it again: *He was in the beginning **with** God (**pros ton theos**). Jn 1:3* Jesus had “*FACETIME*” with God the Father, from all eternity, as it will be for all eternity. And we are part of it! We, as God’s new race, have full access to God’s New Temple on earth. And thus, our next question:

*How does understanding God’s Temple affect our view of the world?*

The Temple is Paul’s second metaphor. He is describing the Church as a building, a structure, a visible organized presence, just as the Temple in Jerusalem had been a magnificent and towering structure. Paul’s first metaphor is the Church as a Body: “*And God put all things under Christ’s feet and gave Christ as head over all things to the church, which is Christ’s body, the fullness of him who fills all in all*” 1:22-23. The body has a head—Christ—and the body has feet; feet that are walking on the earth, in the world. We are the feet. Put these two metaphors together and we have the church as an “*organized organism*.” It is a building and it is a body. Like the building, the body has a purpose, because God has a plan for the Church, and for each one of us in it. God is an architect, a planner, a builder and a creator.

How can understanding these metaphors affect our view of the world? If we are Christ’s body, and are one with Him, then we have to ask ourselves, “*How did Christ treat others, even His enemies? How did Christ interact with His followers and with His father? How many times did He speak of pleasing His father, and of only seeking His father’s will?*” It’s not that we answer these questions and then copy what Jesus did, but that we seek His power and choose to let Him work through us. We go to Him and ask Him to transform us so we can think and act the way He did. He works through us because He is for us. He wants us to succeed in carrying out God’s plan, and to do the works that the Father has already planned for His Church.

If we are God’s Temple, then the model of what God intends for us can be seen in God’s Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was the place where God lived, where He dwelt among His people. It was the place where God’s people went to be cleansed from sin, to find peace, to share in fellowship, to intercede and to pray for others in and outside the nation, to sing and offer praise to God. Sounds a lot like the Church doesn’t it? It should. The Church is a continuation of the Temple that was in Jerusalem, but she is no longer limited by time and space. Jesus is the High Priest and all believers are priests who serve under Him. We all approach and worship the Father and our King through the final sacrifice for sin that Jesus offered at the Cross, then we go out into the world and we continue to offer sacrifices of gratitude and praise, through our gifts of time, talent and treasure.

One idea ties this whole chapter together—our Unity in Christ. The GNB says, “*In our union with Christ Jesus he raised us up with him to rule with him in the heavenly world.*” 2:6. See the emphasis here? Not the cross, but our elevated heavenly position *TODAY!* But in 2:13 “*But now, in union with Christ Jesus you, who used to be far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* Notice the focus—it *IS* the cross, the sacrificial death of Jesus so that we could be brought near. Near to what, or better, to *WHOM?* To the Jews, God’s covenant people. “*...by means of the cross he united both races into one body and brought them back to God.* 2:16 Both races—Jews and

Gentiles are now in ONE body, ONE building, ONE Temple. We are now the PLACE God lives: *“In union with him (Christ) you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit.”* It is all about unity, about “oneness” in the Body with Christ as her Head. It is also one Temple Building with Christ as the Cornerstone of the foundation. The foundation is completed by the teaching and the authority of the Apostles and prophets: foundation stones that line up with the perfect stone. *“You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself.”* 2:20. We are stones in a building, parts of a body, all working together, in unity, as one, so that we can carry out the father’s purpose for us: *“God has made us what we are (part of a building and a body), and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.”* All of this is all consistent with Paul’s theme: *“A plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”* (1:10) God has a plan, God has a purpose.

I think Tim Keller sums it up perfectly: *“We see these dynamics vividly come together in 1 Pet 2:5 ‘Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.’ ... Peter describes Christians as living stones in a new temple. Stones in a building represent a nonorganic metaphor. But Peter tells us that the stones of this temple are alive, and so the temple does, indeed “grow”. This suggests we should understand the church to be both an organism (which grows naturally) and an organization (which is structured and ordered).”*<sup>2</sup>

What does this mean for our local church? The foundation of every Church is finished; it is Christ. There is no other foundation. Every church is an amazing wonder. Our local church is God’s home, His dwelling place on earth, and from there Christ governs us and leads us. It is where we celebrate the glory and the power of the resurrected life. Every church presents a foretaste of heaven—and together, all churches, all of the “stones,” will one day be gathered together. We will live forever!<sup>3</sup>

*Dear Jesus, when we come to you in confidence to Your Throne of Grace, as the writer of Hebrews tells us to do, it is because You are the Head of our Church. You are merciful to us, gracious to us, far beyond what we deserve, but you love us and want to help us. You want us to succeed! We Praise You in the name of Our Father! Amen.*

<sup>1</sup>Richard Coekin, Explore by the Book “Ephesians” p.199

<sup>2</sup>Timothy Keller, Center Church “Serving a Movement” pp. 207-208

<sup>3</sup>Richard Coekin, Explore by the Book “Ephesians” p.206