

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XXXVI : THE LOCAL CHURCH IN EPHESIANS 2 (2:11-22)

In our last lesson evidence was provided to show Paul was speaking of the local ecclesia in this portion of scripture. That being so, what practical lessons may we glean from Paul's instruction?

THE FULL ACCEPTANCE OF ALL BELIEVERS IN CHRIST

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are members of God's household” – v19

This is true of all believers vertically; anyone coming to Christ is accepted because of the work of Christ:

“... to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” (Eph 1:6; see also Col 1:12; Rom 5:1)

But Paul's main emphasis here is not the vertical relationship between the sinner and our Lord but the horizontal relationship between believers, specifically between the Jews and the Gentiles in this context. ***“The first Gentile believers who were admitted to a church comprising Jewish Christians could well have felt ill at ease; it was desirable that they should be made to feel completely at home. The church had a Jewish base; its members had Jewish presuppositions, and it would have been too easy for Gentile Christians to do or say something which was felt to be out of place. What indeed was their status in such a community? Were they there on sufferance, as visitors, like the God-fearing Gentiles who attended synagogue in cities of the dispersion? Was their position like that of resident aliens in a Greek city, or that of peregrini in Rome? In a crisis like that which arose in Antioch when Peter and others abandoned the practice of table-fellowship with Gentile Christians Paul protested vigorously at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14), and it is Paul's attitude that finds uncompromising expression here.”*** [Bruce, 302]

peregrini — Latin for a pilgrim, a wanderer, or a journeying foreigner. Originally, the Romans divided all persons into *Cives* and *Peregrini*: the *cives* had *connubium* (the faculty of contracting a Roman marriage) and *commercium* (the right of acquiring ownership); the *peregrini* had neither.

As Bruce goes on to note, this door swung both ways in the course of time. “In writing to the Christians of Rome, Paul implies that some of the Gentiles among them were inclined to look down on their Jewish fellow-Christians as poor relations, mercifully rescued from an apostate nation, and he warns them against such an attitude: ‘remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you’ (Rom 11:18). They had been cut out of the wild olive,

the fruitless shoot to which they originally belonged, and grafted into the good olive tree, to share the nutrition and fertility of the true people of God. The credit was not theirs; they were entirely indebted to God's mercy. ***In our present epistle there is no suggestion that its Gentile recipients stood in need of such a warning; what they are given is full encouragement to magnify the grace of God which has rescued them from their former place as rank outsiders and instated them among his children.***” [Bruce, 303] Therefore when one comes to Christ, their past is gone and forgiven. We believers should accept them as such. By the grace of God, I believe our church does this well.

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD AND TO EACH OTHER IS ALL BASED UPON THE WORK OF CHRIST

“For He Himself is our peace, who did make both groups into one and did break down the dividing wall of hostility” – v14

‘He himself’ — Emphatic because of position. Some takes this to mean “He Himself and no other” while others state there is no contrast implied in the grammar.

“for through Him we both have our access by one Spirit to the Father” – v18

“‘For’ introduces this statement as one which provides the grounds for the assertion of the previous verse that Christ has proclaimed peace to the far off and peace to the near. This reinforces our interpretation of the nature of the peace announced to the two groups. ***Since both have access to the Father through Christ in the one Spirit, the same good news of peace with God can be brought to both.***” [Lincoln, 149]

‘access’ has the basic meaning of “*freedom or right to enter.*” “[B]elievers come to God only through what Christ has done for them or as he introduces them. ***The root was used in the contemporary world to describe the approach of people to a ruler and, more importantly, for the offering of sacrificial gifts (Lev 1.2, 3, 10, etc.).... Christ presents believers to his Father. If God is to be encountered the way must be opened, not from our end but from his.***” [Best, 273f]

“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone” – v20

“This clause ... serves to set off Christ both from the foundation of the apostles and prophets and from those who have been placed on that foundation.” [Lincoln, 154]

“in whom [each several] building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord” – v 21

“The existence of the church is centred on Christ.” [Best, 288] “In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul says: ‘In whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.’ (Eph. 2:21,22 RV) ***Here are two distinct affirmations: First — each several building or particular assembly growth into a holy temple of the Lord. That is by itself it is a temple of the Lord. Second — What is true of each is true of the church at Ephesus, ‘In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.’ Just before this he had written of the church as an institution, or abstractly, in which Jew and Gentile are made into one. But the abstract become concrete in each several building.***” [Carroll, *Ecclesia*, pg 12] “‘And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the (Greek, every) building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.’ (Eph 2:20,21) ... The Ephesian letter was probably an encyclical, intended to circulate among several churches. Then 2:21 has greater meaning if ‘all the’ (Gk., *pasa*) of the King James version yields to the American Standard’s ‘each several building.’ This more accurate translation implies that Paul was not writing about one vast universal church, but rather about many distinct, individual, ‘local’ churches. Then each church, in every century and in every land, may claim the first church as its divine pattern.” [S. E. Anderson, *The First Church*, pg 12f]

SALVATION RECONCILES BOTH VERTICALLY AND HORIZONTALLY

“For He Himself is our peace, who did make both groups into one and did break down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, in order that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace” – vv 14,15

“The discussion unveils a new aspect of the work of Christ: the reconciliation of people not only to God but also to one another. Salvation is more than believers receiving the forgiveness of their sins, deliverance from the grip of the powers, adoption as children of God, and union with Christ in resurrection and exaltation. Salvation means union with one another.”

[Best, 235] This is speaking to us as believers within our own local body. It is one thing to say we have ‘peace’ with some mystical body, some spiritual unity with which we never confront. It is quite another thing to deal with real live people face-to-face, day after day, year after year. It is that kind of local body to which Paul is addressing these comments.

so making peace, — “The creation of the new person takes place simultaneously with the making of peace (present participle, not necessarily signifying a continuous activity as if Christ keeps on making peace, though this indeed may be true). The peace is clearly that between Jew and Gentile.” [Best, 263] ***“The peace in view at this point is between the two old enemies, not with God,*** and making peace here, as in Col 1:20, is a synonym for reconciling, the notion which follows immediately.” [Lincoln, 144]

“in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord” – v21

“In important ancient buildings the stones were carefully fitted together, συναρμολογουμένη [sunarmologoumenē] (only elsewhere at 4.16), being smoothed where the surfaces met, dowel holes drilled and dowels inserted. ***The stones which are here being fitted together (present tense, denoting continual action) are not the two groups, Jewish and Gentile Christians, but individual believers.*** Thus the argument which moved in v. 20 from believers as members of a household into the material with which the house was built and indicated the positions of apostles, prophets and Christ now ***depicts believers as harmoniously related to the believers beside, above and below them. No stone should be out of place. Since in fact believers do not always fit harmoniously together, as 4.25ff shows, the church is pictured as it ought to be rather than as it is.***” [Best, 286f] “The participle συναρμολογέω [sunarmologoeō] is used only here and 4:16. Paul coined this word by adding the prepositional prefix συν- [sun] to the rare verb ἁρμολογέω [harmologeō] meaning ‘to join’ or ‘pile together’ stones for a tomb. Hence, it would have the resultant meaning ‘to join, fit together,’ especially in regard to a construction made of stones. ***Today the process of fitting stones together is rather simple because mortar is used. In that day with no use of mortar, there was an elaborate process of cutting and smoothing the stones so that they fit exactly next to each other.*** The prepositional prefix συν- [sun], which is common in Ephesians only, intensifies the fitting together. ***It speaks of the inner unity or harmony among believers who, before their conversion, were at enmity with one another.*** The present passive participle describes the manner of their growth. ***Specifically, as recipients of God’s grace, they grow by being carefully fitted together rather than growing apart individually from one another. Notice that it is not self-initiative that causes the growth but the gracious action of God who fits individual believers with each other and with the foundation and cornerstone. If ancient masons used an elaborate process to fit the stones together, one can be assured that God, even more, by his grace is carefully fitting together the individuals who are a part of his building. His desire is to bring inner unity in order that corporate growth can occur.***” [Hoehner, 409] Excellent comments but I feel compelled to add this observation: Hoehner is a universal church man yet his understanding of this passage points specifically to a local church application. Without a local church application, his comments are mere theory.

EACH TRUE NT ASSEMBLY IS A MICROCOSM OF ETERNITY

“and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.” – v16

As we commented on Ephesians 1:10, the theme of the book of Ephesians is the reconciliation of the universe under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Therefore each local congregation is a microcosm, a little picture of what heaven will be like one day. ***“The Church is not only the place of reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, it is also the place where reconciliation between humanity and God is experienced, where harmony between heaven and earth has been restored, and where access to the Father is enjoyed. The high God of heaven has chosen to make it his dwelling place on earth, and the Christ who has been exalted to heaven forms the crowning stone in its structure. The Church is where men and women experience a sense of being at home, of belonging, not only to one another in a unified humanity as fellow citizens, but also to God himself as part of his household or family. This new society is also a building, a temple, where humans are the building material which God the builder has already made into his dwelling place. No longer the literal temple in Jerusalem but the community of the Church is the focus for God’s presence in the world. The Church is already the temple in which God dwells.”*** [Lincoln, 162]

SALVATION IS THE SAME FOR ALL PEOPLE, JEW OR GENTILE

“and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.” – v16

“Whatever advantages Jews may once have had (v. 12) no distinction is now made between the ways in which they and Gentiles are reconciled to God.” [Best, 265] “The discontinuity between Israel, as the people of God, and the Church is evidenced also by vv 16, 17, where Jews as well as Gentiles are said to be reconciled to God by Christ, and where ‘the near’ need peace with God proclaimed to them as well as ‘the far.’ Despite what he believed to have been their real advantages, this writer holds also that Israel too was alienated from her God.” [Lincoln, 163] While not specifically a part of this text, we should also recognize salvation has always been the same for all people, in both the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Consider how the NT writers use the Old Testament as examples of our salvation:

David: *“But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.’”* (Rom 4:5-8 NKJV)

Abraham: *“Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.”* (Rom 4:9,10 NKJV)

Abraham: *“Just as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, In you all the nations shall be blessed. So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”* (Gal 3:6-9 NKJV)

THE NT ASSEMBLY SHOULD BE COMPOSED OF PEOPLE WHO ARE SAVED ONLY

“and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.” – v16

Those within the churches are just assumed in this passage to be those ‘reconciled’ to God. This is not to suggest church services are not open to the public and to the unsaved, but the focus and all decision-making must be among those who are already ‘reconciled to God.’ “This verse is not a consequence of v. 15b but parallel to it; terms are balanced (two – both, create – reconcile, in him – in one body, making peace – killing); like v. 15b it depends on $\iota\upsilon\alpha$ [hina, ‘in order to’] and provides a second purpose relating to the whole of vv. 14b-15a. ***Unlike v. 15b which spoke of the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles, v. 16 treats the relationship of both to God; thus the ambiguity of horizontal and vertical which commenced in v. 13 is continued and at the same time resolved. Not only do Jew and Gentile move towards one another; both move towards God.... Here the reconciliations are as inseparable as the two great commandments to love.***” [Best, 263f] While we might consider this as accepted by all we should realize not all churches believe in a regenerate church membership, as is exemplified in the life of Jonathan Edwards:

“For years, [Jonathan] Edwards had been uncomfortable with the lenient policy on membership and communion set by his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, Edwards’s predecessor at Northampton. Stoddard had allowed almost anyone to join and to partake, hoping that membership and communion might encourage true conversion. In 1748, Edwards changed the policy and told an applicant for church membership that he must first make a public ‘profession of godliness.’ Thus Edwards rejected the “Halfway Covenant”—the longstanding compromise of the Puritans who had, generations after planting their religious colonies, found their church membership dwindling. That compromise had reversed the traditional Puritan requirement that new church members be “visible saints,” godly in word and deed. When the congregation saw that Edwards intended to return to the earlier, stricter Puritan position, demanding not only a profession of faith, but also evidence of repentance and holiness, a firestorm arose.... Though Edwards knew, as he notes in his letters, that he was

likely to lose his pastorate as a result, he stuck to his principles.” [http://gratefultothedead.wordpress.com/2009/12/07/preacher-in-the-hands-of-an-angry-church-the-fall-of-jonathan-edwards/, Oct 13, 2014]

Thus in June 1750, the church of 253 voted ‘the greatest theologian this country has produced’ out of the pulpit, with only 23 members voting in favor of Jonathan Edwards after being in the pulpit for over twenty years.

CORPORATE WORSHIP IS IMPORTANT

“for through Him we both have our access by one Spirit to the Father” – v18

“Access is not conceived here individualistically, every man his own priest, but is an access of the whole church comprising both Jews and Gentiles, an access experienced in worship. Through their cultus Jews already had access, though of a limited nature; Gentiles had none; now both have the same free access.” [Best, 274]

“in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord” – v21

“[T]here is the need for a corporate awareness. The συν- [sun-, ‘together with’] compound here indicates that this is more than an individual experience; the process of being formed into the Church has to take place in the company of fellow believers.” [Lincoln, 158]

CHURCH MEMBERS ARE TO CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER AS FAMILY

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are members of God’s household” – v19

Paul now changes his metaphor to a household, almost implying kinship. ***“The house and the city were very similar concepts in the ancient world. This phrase then, unlike the first which referred to a relationship among believers, relates believers to God. Christians form a community related to Christ or God behind which lies the concept of Israel as God’s house. Believers are children of God (2 Cor 6.18), adopted as such (1.5) and given access to him (2.18), the head of the household. All this implies intimacy. The [oikeioi] are members of the house, not necessarily kinfolk but certainly not slaves; nor are they ‘guests — here today and away tomorrow’ — well treated when present but forgotten when gone... Gentile Christians, once refugees, are now neither homeless nor stateless. Those who were once outsiders are now insiders.” [Best, 278f]*** This household of God consists of believers, both on earth and in heaven, as well as holy angels.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS . . .

CHURCH ATTENDANCE IS NOT MAGIC — Another potential misunderstanding might be that I believed going to church somehow has a *“mystical, magical power”* and all we need to do is show up and get our *“spiritual fix”* to guarantee God’s blessings. Rather when I stress the church, it involves a whole set of things which are divinely intertwined: *church attendance, prayer support, financial support, emotional support, teaching, learning, a love for the word of God, a concern for those with whom we’ve covenanted together* ... these are some of the things thought of most quickly. Each of these overlap and are involved in each other. ***Church attendance with a hardened heart, an apathetic attitude or the like will not necessarily be corrected merely by stepping in the church building*** (although there are times when the Lord sovereignly chooses to intervene and break a calloused heart; this typically does not happen while watching football but while sitting under the word of God). ***But when God’s man (a missionary, a pastor, a Sunday School teacher or whoever) prays and prepares both his heart and a solid biblical message, and God’s people pray and prepare their heart to receive a message from God, the Lord as a rule does a work only He can do.*** *“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” — Heb 4:12*

WE NEED TO ATTEND CHURCH — Pastor Nile Fisher, retired from Emmanuel Baptist Church in Dayton OH (and now with the Lord) observed the following concerning church attendance: ***When any believer stays out of church for an extended period, they will either (a) backslide to the point they don’t know if they’re saved or lost; or (b) become so self-righteous they cannot enter a church service without an air of superiority and being critical.***

“For many [the local church] is all too literal and imperfect and visible. It is much easier to live in a dream church than in a real one.”

[B. H. Kazee, *The Church and the Ordinances*]