

A Reconciled People

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Date: 25 October 2026

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[0:00] Let's pray together to seek his Spirit's help. Our dear Heavenly Father, we come to you and thank you again this morning that we can come around your word.

! We thank you for reminding us afresh through our hymns, through our prayers, and through the reading of your word, that it is in our Lord Jesus Christ that we have all these wonderful privileges as your people today.

And as we come, we want to remember that it is you who have made this possible for us, that we are able together here to really worship you and to glorify your name.

Our God, we do not know what we would have been if not for our Lord Jesus Christ. But we know that we were lost in trespasses and sins, following after the world and its offers of pleasure, desires. But now, as we come to know our Lord, we realize that there is more to life than those things. And as we come, therefore, we are humbled by the fact that you should save us and give us this taste of true life, eternal life, abundant life.

[1:12] And so we pray now that as we come around your word, may your Holy Spirit help us, teach us, and show us afresh how we ought to live for you.

We thank you that you have guaranteed us this great privilege. And we pray that we will not take it for granted, but make proper and full use of it.

And so we commend our souls to your care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Now, if you have yet to notice, and if you keep your Bibles open to Ephesians chapter 2, we are going to keep quite close to the text.

Now, our text this morning actually brings us to the heart of the series. I say that because the series is entitled One New People. Am I right?

And that title, if I'm not mistaken, is derived from that phrase, One New Man, found in chapter 2, verse 15. Right?

[2:11] That he might create in himself one new man in place of the two. Incidentally, Reverend Dr. John Stott, who wrote a commentary on Ephesians in the Bible Speaks Today series, has given it an almost similar title.

His book is called God's New Society. So this recognition that God, in epistle to the Ephesians, Paul is reminding us of God's new people, God's new society.

Now then, they certainly capture the titles of John Stott, the titles of your church series, capture the main theme of our text, right through to chapter 3, verse 12.

I say that because the one new man that is mentioned here by Paul, the church, the body of Christ, comprising both Jews and Gentiles, continues right through to chapter 3, verse 12.

Notice how in speaking of the Gentiles in chapter 2, verse 12, Paul has portrayed them as alienated. Do you see that? From Israel's strangers to the covenants of promise God had made with Israel.

[3:29] That was chapter 2, verse 12. But by chapter 2, verse 19, the Gentiles are no longer strangers and aliens today. Rather, they have become fellow citizens and members of the household of God, together with the Jews.

Now that is captured in chapter 3, verse 6. This mystery, and I'm reading from the ESV, English Standard Version. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Chapter 3, verse 10. Paul emphasizes that it is through the church that the manifold wisdom of God is made known to all. So, the theme of one body in Christ, God's new people, one new man, one new people, runs right through, from chapter 2, verse 11, to chapter 3, verse 12.

Now, just prior to this, at the beginning of chapter 2, Paul had explained to the Ephesian Christians how despite their pagan, godless, and idolatrous background as Gentiles, God has mercifully saved them through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So that, chapter 2, verse 7, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness to others in Christ Jesus. But at the same time, he not only saved each one of us individually, he also incorporated us into his new society, this one new man.

[5:06] And it would seem that Paul is anxious that the Ephesian Christians should understand that salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ is not individualistic in nature.

That somehow, now that you are a Christian, well, you can go it alone, just between you and the Lord, and so nothing else, right? No, no, no.

That was never God's purpose or plan. It was always his purpose to create one new people, one new man, so that all together we can express the abundance and the fullness of the riches of God's glory more comprehensively than if it was just one individual here or individual there.

So this is the key here, one new people. So if you are a Christian this morning, can I remind you, you are a part of that one new people God has created through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You cannot opt out of it. To opt out is to throw into question if you have really understood what it means to be saved by our Lord Jesus Christ.

[6:18] It was always God's purpose that you ought to belong to his church. He saved you for that purpose, that you ought to be living and serving him and his people within the community of his one new people.

So keep that in mind if you are a Christian this morning. And just so we are clear about what Paul is emphasizing here, let's follow what he has written here as closely as possible.

You notice it begins in verse 11, And then next he says in verse 13, And then he tells us what that change means, up to verse 18.

And then finally and thirdly, he says in verse 19, So then, and from there on to the end of the chapter, he explains the reality of being a part of the one new body, one new man.

Alright? Well, let's take each one in turn. And we begin with, Therefore, remember, verses 11 and 12. Twice, in verse 11 and verse 12, He tells the Ephesian Christians to remember.

[7:48] We are very forgetful, aren't we? I can say that as I get older, I become even more forgetful. So if you have told me already this morning or yesterday or the last two days what your name is and I have forgotten, please forgive me.

Alright? But remembering is very important, isn't it? Remember what? At one time, verse 11. At that time, verse 12. Meaning before they became Christians, he says, You were Gentiles, he told the Ephesian Christians.

You were looked down upon by the circumcised people, the Jews, as uncircumcised people. And why were you looked down upon by the Jews?

Because for the Jews, circumcision was a mark of their special relationship with God, a distinction they alone of all the people on earth had and always enjoyed.

And you know, from verse 12 onwards, Paul pouts on what these Ephesians were like before they became Christians, in comparison with the Jews.

[8:53] So, for instance, it says, You were separated from Christ. Unlike the Jews, you see, who knew from their Old Testament that all the promises God has made will be eventually, finally fulfilled in and through our Lord Jesus Christ, through the coming Messiah, these Ephesian Christians knew nothing about that before they became Christians.

They didn't, wouldn't have heard of the coming Messiah, nor their need for one. Not only so, as Gentiles, these Ephesian Christians, were alienated in the past from the commonwealth of Israel, meaning they were never part of the people called Israel.

Now, in your reading of the book of Acts, I don't know if you have noticed, but you would have come across people called the proselytes, for example, meaning Gentiles who were full converts to Judaism.

But they were also what Luke, the writer of Acts, called God-fearers in the book of Acts. That is, Gentiles who are not full converts to Judaism, but they revere God, they revere Yahweh, the God of Israel, and would attend the local synagogue where they are.

Now, Paul spent three years in Ephesus, much more than any other city he visited, and not once do you read, for example, in the book of Acts, any mention of proselytes or God-fearers in that city.

[10:24] Very unusual. So, it would seem that Ephesus was as pagan or Gentile a city as you can get them. They knew nothing, the Gentiles, about the commonwealth of Israel.

They were not a part of it. And because of that, Paul rightly goes on to add that they were strangers to the covenant promises, meaning all the promises that God has made in covenant to Abraham and then later on to Jacob or Israel or to the nation of Israel under Moses and then to David and to Solomon.

Now, these Ephesians knew nothing about that before they came to Christ. They knew nothing of the blessings and privileges which came with God's covenant promises.

No wonder, Paul said, didn't he, you were without hope. What hope do they have if they knew nothing of the covenant promises of God?

In fact, while Paul was in Ephesus, Paul saw himself what no hope without hope meant for the Ephesians. Look at Acts 19, verses 11 to 12.

[11:34] In Acts 19, verses 11 to 12, and if you want to know what Paul's time in Ephesus was like, please read Acts 19, verse 11 to 12.

And we read there, and God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin, Paul's skin, were carried away to the sick and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

If you have that happening in your church, think what that would do. Mind you, it wasn't as if the Ephesians didn't have their gods who could have helped them in those circumstances.

After all, it wasn't actually Ephesus, the centre of Artemis worship, the great goddess, as the Ephesians would call her.

But great as she was, she was completely helpless and hopeless in the face of their suffering. They couldn't do what Paul's God could do. They were without hope.

[12:49] And Paul adds, they were without God. They were without the one and only true God and living God, Yahweh, the God of Israel.

So for all their boasts of their great goddess Artemis, it was an empty boast. Is it any wonder that having seen what Yahweh could do to Paul, fear came upon everyone, both Jews and Greeks, in and around Ephesus?

And as Acts chapter 19, verse 17, Booth said, the name of Jesus was extolled in Ephesus. Now, why did Paul remind the Ephesian Christians to remember all that?

Where they had come from? Now, I'm not sure if you agree, but it has been said that the large part of the battle to stay true as a Christian to our Lord Jesus Christ is just this, remembering what you were before you became a Christian.

If I ask you this morning, can you remember what you were before you became a Christian?

Someone I knew many years ago held a pretty high position in his company.

[14:09] He was walking on the road and he saw a credit card on the floor and he picked it up and it belonged, of course, to someone else and instead of returning it to the bank, he began using it for his own purchases.

Of course, he was soon caught. He could have been jailed for it. But, some of us in the church happened to know him and so we prayed for him that the sentence will be more lenient.

Well, in the end, he was fined and he was not jailed, alright? And he kept his job, of course. For several years after that, he seemed very, very thankful to the Lord for delivering him from what he didn't deserve to escape from.

I mean, if he had been jailed, I don't know what would have happened. But then he left to work somewhere else. And years later, I happened to visit him and by then, he was a high-flying CEO of a huge company.

And I noticed instantly how he has changed. He was proud. He was arrogant. He had nothing positive, in fact, to say about the Christian faith at all and nothing positive to say about God.

[15:32] It was almost as if all that happened to him in that crime years ago had never happened. He has completely forgotten God's grace to him when he needed it most.

And how, if not for God's mercy, he could have gone to jail and thus not climbed the social, economic, corporate ladder. If only he had remembered and remembered it well, they would have kept him humble and eternally grateful to the Lord.

Therefore, remember, remember where you came from before you came to know the Lord. You want to stay true to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Remember what you were before you came to know him as your Lord and Savior. remember how awful a spiritual state you were in if you didn't know before because Paul paints that here to the Ephesian Christians in chapter 2, verses 1 to 3.

You were dead in trespasses and sins, following the course of this world, living in the passions of your flesh, carrying out the desires of your body and your mind.

[16:53] And remembering all that, unpleasant as it may be, is important because that will help you appreciate all the more what Christ has done for you now that you are a Christian.

That is what verses 13 to 18 is going to tell us. Yes, it was true you were in an awful spiritual state before you came to Christ, but now, in Christ Jesus, all that has changed.

Not least, with regards to what Paul has mentioned in verses 11 to 12, that as Gentiles, the Ephesians never enjoyed the privileges that the Jews had as the people of God.

But not anymore. Now that you are a Christian, you can enjoy those privileges that the Jews had as God's people. Note how Paul highlights that in his reputed use of certain terms right here in our text. In verse 13, he speaks of the Ephesians as those who once were far off, but now they have been brought near by the blood of Christ and brought near to God, that is, to God's people.

[18:03] Go down to verse 17. Paul insists that he came to preach peace to you, the Ephesians, who were far off and peace also to those who were near.

Who are the people who were far off? Gentiles. Who are the people who are near? Jews. Alright? And then his emphasis on Christ making both Jews and Gentiles one is found in verse 14, who has made us both one.

Look at verse 16, reconciles both to God in one body. And of course, verse 15, create in himself one new man. And then the word peace, which appears in verse 14, verse 15, twice in verse 17, coupled with the term hostility, because hostility is the opposite of peace, in verse 14, verse 16. Now, they all tell us that while alienated from one another before, Jews and Gentiles are now one new man in Christ at peace with each other.

not to be overlooked, Paul's use of the term hostility suggests that the relationship between Jews and Gentiles before they became one in Christ was not mere toleration.

[19:30] Actually, it was positively hostile. Jews and Gentiles before Christ, their relationship was hostile, more so from Jewish side than the Gentile side.

Now, why do I say that? If you go back to verses 11 to 12, what, according to Paul, marked the difference between Jews and Gentiles? Well, the Jews certainly enjoyed some special privileges as God's chosen people which the Gentiles knew nothing of.

And you know, those special privileges that they enjoyed has been going on for more than 2,000 years since the time of their founding father, the Jewish founding father, Abraham.

2,000 years before this epistle was written, the Jews had been enjoying the covenant promises of God. And Paul expresses this very, very clearly in verse 11, the Jews distinguished themselves from Gentiles by one physical mark on their bodies which male Jews were absolutely proud of, circumcision.

To the Jew, you are either circumcised or you are uncircumcised. If you are uncircumcised, you are not God's people.

[21:02] You have to be circumcised if you wish to belong. That, by the way, marked the difference between Gentiles who became proselytes and those who were Gentiles who were God-fearers.

proselytes were full Jews because they circumcised. God-fearers were not ready for circumcision. And since they understand circumcision, the Jews, to mark off all those who belong to God's people, then by logic, if you are not circumcised, you are not God's people and therefore you are not saved.

And to suggest otherwise is tantamount to blasphemy. To say that Gentiles can be saved without becoming circumcised, without being a Jew, that's completely unacceptable to the Jews.

That's why the Jews in Jesus' day got so mad at our Lord Jesus Christ at the beginning of his ministry. Jesus attended the synagogue in his hometown, Nazareth, on a Sabbath, and he had been asked to read the scriptures, the Old Testament, which Jesus did.

[22:20] And according to Luke chapter 4, verse 22, after he read it, everyone in his hometown spoke well of him, and they even remember who his father was. Until we read in verses 24 to 27 of Luke chapter 4, this is what it says in Luke chapter 4, verse 24, verse 27.

And Jesus said, Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown, but in truth I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and the great famine came over all the land.

And Elijah was sent to none of these widows, but only to Jeriphth in the land of Sidon, not Israel, to a woman who was a widow.

And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elijah, and none of them was cleansed. Hey, this is lepers in Israel, you know, not cleansed, but only Naaman, the Syrian. Our Lord Jesus said that. What irked his hometown people is not his claim that no prophet is acceptable in his own hometown, but what he said about the widow of Zadokfath and the Naaman, the leper.

[23 : 49] They were both pagans. They were not Jews. And yet Jesus seemed to imply that Yahweh, the God of Israel, not only showed them mercy, but prioritized them above his own people, above the many widows in Israel, verse 25, above the many lepers in Israel, verse 27.

Now, if you were a Jew in Jesus' day and you live in Jesus' hometown, you wouldn't be blamed, would you, for wanting to get rid of Jesus here? How could he even dare suggest that God saved Gentiles and, worse of all, prioritized Gentiles above his own people, the Jews?

By the way, if you didn't know before, that was why the Jews persecuted Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles. You read in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 16, and Paul speaking of the Jews who opposed him, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 16, why did they hinder him from speaking to the Gentiles?

Because they are afraid that the Gentiles might be saved. To the Jewish mind, Gentiles are destined for hell, lake of fire, unless they become Jews, and that by circumcision, they can't be saved otherwise.

And it is this very Paul, this Hebrew of Hebrews, remember his past, and a Pharisee had that, a persecutor of the church, whom God appointed to be an apostle to the Jews?

[25 : 47] No, to the Gentiles. would he have done what he had done if he hadn't been personally confronted by our Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and dramatically saved by our Lord Jesus?

Would he have done it? What did Paul feel at that point when the Lord Jesus told him, I've appointed you to be an apostle to the Gentiles?

Wouldn't he have been utterly shocked? He went against all his predispositions as a Jew. I'm not surprised to read what he wrote in Galatians chapter 1 verses 15 to 17.

He said this, but when God who has set me apart before I was born and he called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, he said, I did not immediately consult with anyone, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus.

Do you think that the original apostles would have believed Paul if Paul told them I've been commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ to the Gentiles?

[27 : 28] Mind you, all the original apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ were Jews. The first recorded conversion of a Gentile, the Ethiopian eunuch required the direct prompting of an angel to Philip to share the gospel with the eunuch.

Philip, on his own accord, would not have done it. Peter was asked to preach the gospel to Cornelius the centurion, but would he have done it if not for the direct vision he had that God gave him all the forbidden food the Jews are not supposed to eat and God says what I have declared clean don't call it unclean go and speak to Cornelius the Gentile.

You know there was this inbuilt resistance reluctance to offer God salvation to the Gentiles among the Jews even though our Lord Jesus Christ had already died risen from the dead ascended into heaven said that God is right him and years later that inbuilt resistance was still there did you remember how Paul in Galatians chapter 2 shared about one occasion when he had to confront Peter the apostle because he withdrew from fellowshiping with Gentile Christians and he was pressured by the Jewish Christians not to fellowship with Gentile Christians and Paul noted in Galatians chapter 2 even Barnabas his best friend in mission failed on that occasion now

I hope you can see by now how deep seated a problem this was not only for the Jews but actually for Jewish Christians how could their God include the Gentiles as his own people when they had not been his people at all in the first place well Paul offers the answer here in our text now reading what he wrote here I get a feeling that there was such a personal revolution in his own thinking that

he probably wondered if he's in his right mind to become a missionary to the Gentiles and it all boils down to his new understanding of what the Old Testament thought about God's plan of salvation not just for the Jews but actually for all of mankind now I could take a long time in this because I could go through the whole Old Testament to show you that God actually intended the Gentiles to be saved as well but let me briefly share what Paul soon learned as he re-read the Old Testament with spirit enlightened eyes now he would have learned that the prince of peace who is promised in Isaiah chapter 9 verse 7 for example was none other than the suffering servant of the Lord the Lord Jesus who would die ignominiously in Isaiah chapter 53 and that death will result in the salvation of not just the Jews but all people Paul would have learned that from Isaiah chapter 54 if you haven't read it that comes after the suffering servant's death and all the way from chapter 54 to chapter 66 of Isaiah that death will reconcile both Jews and [31 : 29] Gentiles with God by the way Paul marked that in verse 16 of our text he says Jesus death reconciles us both to God what does he mean it means it is my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge because you have rejected knowledge I reject you speaking to the Jews there from being a priest to me and since you have forgotten the law of your

God I also will forget your children how you know Hosea chapter 11 verse 7 God says sorry I don't know how Hosea felt when God told him to name his newborn son Lord Ami means what? Not my people and why Hosea chapter 1 verse 9 for you Israel are not my people and I am not your God like the Gentiles they needed to be reconciled with their God and that through Christ death alone and then this hostility between Jews and Gentiles according to verse 14 of our text Christ died in order to break down that dividing wall of hostility verse 16 through the cross Christ killed that hostility such was the effect of Jesus death the two were not only reconciled we are reading here they were made one new man and new because the church will have an entirely new identity as God's people quite unlike God's people in the Old Testament where one had to be a Jew by being born a Jew or be converted to a Jew by circumcision but not anymore not that Christ has died there is no need for it as Paul so clearly put it in Galatians chapter 3 verse 28 there is neither Jew nor Greek there is neither slave nor free in the church of God there is no male or female for you are all one in Christ Jesus is a completely new identity Colossians chapter 3 verse 11 referring to the church Paul writes this here there is not Greek and Jew circumcised and uncircumcised barbarians Ketians slave free but Christ is all in all now there's a lot more I could say but I hope that has helped you to appreciate how Paul had to unlearn his inbuilt prejudice as a Jew against Gentiles and to relearn afresh what God's plan of salvation was it was never exclusively entirely a Jewish privilege it was a privilege that Christ has offered to all and at the center of God's plan of salvation is who Jesus Christ and him crucified do you notice Paul's emphasis in our text in verse 13 by the blood of Christ that's a cross verse 14 in his flesh verse 16 through the cross you know Paul is not ashamed is he to spell it out in all those terms about how Christ suffered physically for your sake and my sake in order that we might say the cross cross and you've got two of them here one right in front of the book one behind the cross was a symbol of shame in

[36 : 21] Roman times but Paul was never ashamed of the cross of Jesus Christ as he put in Galatians chapter 6 verse 14 Now looking at our text this morning you can understand why he gloried in the cross of Christ because it is the cross which has made possible all that we have looked at so far reconciliation for both the Jews and the Gentiles with God that couldn't come about without the cross reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles that couldn't have happened without the cross the creation of the one new man the church comprising both Jews and Gentiles living in unity and harmony that came about because of the cross and not forgetting of course verse 18 that it was a cross that both

Jews and Gentiles can now have access in one spirit to the father note as well that Paul is telling the efficient Christians what it took for their salvation and cooperation into the body of Christ to become a reality!

It took the excruciating personal sacrifice and death of the son of God number one it needed a cross to achieve it number two it took the resolve of God the father to execute the plan of salvation number three it took the Holy Spirit to mediate our access to the father in a word it took no less than the divine trinity to orchestrate our salvation and may I add to bring into being the one new man that you and I are we are touching holy ground when we are talking about the church did you know that that's why we must be careful not to speak disparagingly of the church even when she fails to

reflect or express

God's desire for her and if we have to criticize the church or God's people we must always do so with a deep and profound respect because she is the creation and the new creation of the triune God please keep that in mind if you want to criticize the church at any time and you know that becomes obvious as we come to the end of our text in verses 19 to 22 I'm going to be brief so then Paul writes in verse 19 you efficient Christians are no longer strangers and aliens no more you are first of all fellow citizens with the saints that means you are now considered to be natives of the same kampung you come from the same kampung as the Jews now more than that you are members of the household of

God you belong to God's family now indeed together with your fellow Jewish brothers and sisters! you are being built into a holy temple of God verse 21 a dwelling place for God verse 22 now all these are images from the Old Testament of God's people and Paul is applying them to this Gentile efficient Christians because that is what Christ's death on the cross has achieved for them that is what the Holy Trinity has planned and purposed for them he is simply reassuring the Gentile Christians in Ephesus that they now truly genuinely belong to God to be God's people and the language of building construction he employs the foundation of the apostles and prophets requires the cornerstone the whole structure being joined together those of you who are in business building construction business

[41:07] I think you understand what all this means now they would remind these efficient Christians that they are not yet the finished product they will not be the finished product until Christ comes again and that spells patience with a big P because they can expect therefore that there always be short comings difficulties challenges since they are not the final product yet but they will get there eventually and absolutely because the triune God is all out to make sure that the one new man will get there look at Paul's emphasis on Christ in verse 20 Christ Jesus being the cornerstone immovable 21 in whom who is that Christ 22 in him who is that Christ the church is built on

Christ around Christ and with Christ input at the end of the day and for as long as that is so the church will not and cannot fail but it's not just Christ isn't it it's not just Christ alone for the church is being built into a dwelling place for God the Father and if so and it is God the Father will ensure it gets done at the end of the day and it will get done because it is the Holy Spirit who will get it done so!

Father Son and Holy Spirit again I mean you can't have a better guarantee of the full and true realization of the church as God intended it than all of that can you and that you will agree should be sufficient reason for you and me to praise and glorify I will triune holy God for all his wonderful reassuring promises that he will get us there because we are feeble as we may be at the moment and that one day we will all enjoy his presence forever and ever and may his name then be always exalted among us here now and forever more Amen Let's pray our dear heavenly father as we come to you we thank you for your word to us and we are so grateful that you know in our hearts how we often doubt what you are doing in us in the church when we see the failures not only of the church but our own selves we realize that we cannot depend on human beings to get this done salvation is from you from beginning to the end and we need you and we are so grateful that even when we don't seem to declare or admit that we need you you continue to support us and continue to help us and continue to change and transform us so that we all will be fit for heaven for your promises in

Jesus name we pray amen