

Introduction

It is an important thing to know our personal identity in Christ, to be part of God's people we are to be those who have individually repented from our sin and put our trust in Jesus Christ. However, a fuller perspective of God's purpose in Christ leads us to see that you can't live an isolated and divided life as a believer from others of God's family.

Ephesians speaks right into this. In adopting God's perspective, Paul also helps us to see that we have come into a new community, a people. There is a corporate identity that we are now brought into. The people of God, in Christ are described in this book in a number of ways, the body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, House of God, a family and those fit to fight. We are going to keep ourselves to the following passage this morning, Ephesians 2:11-22.

Read the text.

We read the line here, 'one new man'. We need to understand that in Christ God has done something utterly outstanding in creating a new people. What does this mean for us and how is this possible?

Right through the bible God has wanted a people for His name. Initially we see that through Israel God had a covenant people who were supposed to be a light to the world. (God has always intended for His salvation to reach to the ends of the earth.) (Isaiah 49:6, Isaiah 42:1-6) This had failed.

However, we see here that God, in Christ, has done a brand new thing. A greater thing. He has created a new people in Christ.

This has a major significant impact for the world. Paul tells us that a change has occurred for us who were gentiles according to natural descent. Our condition was one of ALIENATION. The result in Christ is that we are able to be brought close.

ALIENATION seems such a key and important subject today. Particularly as so many people are isolated, it can lead to feeling alienated, but God has done something so amazing in Jesus Christ. If you are believer you are no longer alienated but rather INCLUDED in God's purpose and plan. God's people in Christ are the New Man that we mentioned earlier.

It reminds me of the musical Oliver when he and the other children in the workhouse are being served gruel but look on to see the delicious food that Mr Bumble. They look on at the promise of something better but with no hope of enjoying it. In the same way, we were like this outside of Christ.

1. Christ is the solid ground of the New Community

- a. The gentiles (those who were not Jews by birth) were far away, because they are not part of the covenants of God and their promise, the commonwealth of Israel, without hope.
- b. Even those who were near because of the covenants of promise, can only enter through Jesus Christ.
- c. How has he done this.
 - i. By the blood of Jesus – through His work on the cross, he has dealt with everything opposed to us coming to Know God and being part of his family
 - ii. Abolished the law of commandments
 1. Ceremonial Law ordinances abolished in Christ – this was a major barrier between Jews and Gentiles being close to God. E.G we know that circumcision that matters now is of the heart by the spirit (Rom 2:29)
 2. The moral law is not abolished but is revealed as no means of salvation, no way of trying to please God because Romans 3:23 tells us that we have all fallen short of God's glorious standard.
 - iii. Jesus having fulfilled the law and met the demands of God in relation to sacrifice for sin and has brought peace to us.

2. Dividing wall of hostility gone.

With the basis of this new covenant no longer being whether or not I was born a Jew or a gentile, God has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.

- Church is not, therefore, based on any lesser identity.
- Church is therefore not defined by squabbles and fights
- Church is therefore a place where we need to walk in love together

- John 13 tells us that the world will know that we are His disciples by the way that we love one another. Loving each other as Christ loved us
- It is not to be a divided community
- When talking about our inheritance Paul tells us:
- *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 2:28)*
- Paul is not talking about no distinction, or saying that we don't have cultural differences, men and women are different, headship is real, BUT we all inherit the same in Christ.

3. From refugees, to citizens

We are presented with this truth that we were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. He is writing to the Ephesians, those under Roman rule and now he reveals that we are no longer aliens and strangers.

Aliens – those who are strangers in a foreign land. We are aliens in the world, but that is because we are those who belong to a different kingdom.

- Citizens of heaven
- Under the kingship of Jesus
- Jewish world – Jesus is presented now as the king who was the true descendant of David (Acts 2) – Don't look to the past, but look to Jesus
- Gentile world, the empire that is now so prevalent is not going to last forever, look to Jesus – his kingdom is everlasting
- Of the increase of His government and peace, there will be no end
- We are to seek first the government and peace
- Whilst we are to obey the authorities in this world that govern countries (unless they go against God's law directly). We are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness
- This is a kingdom of a different order – it is not natural but supernatural – Righteousness, Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17)

4. From Orphans, to God's family

One of the most awful things in life is to be excluded from family. Not to have a place to belong. We are told that we were like this being alienated from God, who is our Father, but now we have come to Him in Jesus.

The context here, though, reveals to us that we are not just those who have individually been brought to the father, but because of that we have brothers and sisters. This is now the family of God. In his household.

Whatever your earthly experience of family, this is to be better.

Again we are challenged by the notion of walking in unity and love as His people and to walk in step with rule/ way of God's household.

1 John 4:11 tells us that if we love God we should also love one another

1 John 4:20-21 states - *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

5. The dwelling place of God.

This is a significant development, we are the household of God, but we are to become a building for God to dwell in by his spirit.

It has always been God's plan to dwell with His people. In the New covenant, after Pentecost, we see that God is not just up for visitation but is into habitation.

Temple here is significant. For Jews this had long been the centre of their ceremonial, cultural and religious life. It was the place where the shikina glory of the Lord had dwelt, as He had manifested himself in the tabernacle of Moses. However things had changed. By the time of Jesus, this glory had departed. Jesus, Himself had walked around the temple and left early () (There was no presence there).

For the Ephesians a temple was important. The city was the place of the idol Diana's temple. This pagan and lifeless religion did not cut the mustard. In Acts 19 we see how

the contrast between God's new society and people and the dead religion of the ephesians caused a major riot.

What Paul states is that God has done something new in Christ. Now his people world-wide have become the dwelling place of God by His spirit. A new type of temple.

1 Peter 2: 4-5 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus, when promising the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Joh's gospel said that my father and I will come and make our home with you. (John)

So we see that there is a great dynamic shift after the Holy Spirit is poured out, now the presence, power and life of the God was to be carried in every believer and together as God's heavenly community on earth.

Like the picture in Ezekiel of the river of life flowing from the temple, so the Holy Spirit is to flow out of every believer. Like Jesus said flow from our inner being. (John 7)

This temple speaks of the church world wide, but also our own bodies and the local expression of the church we are part of.

- We need to be holy to be the fitting place for God to dwell by his spirit
- We need to let Him build us into the people that we are called to be
- This building is one with foundations – apostles and prophets – it is centred on the word of God and has Jesus as the corner stone.
- Let the river flow.

So God's purposes have taken on a new dimension because of Christ. The gentile does not any longer have to be an alien. Nor does the Jew have to be trapped in an attempt to please God through legal demands. Rather then, Through Christ one new man exists, a new people who are walking in this world as citizens and representatives of a heavenly and eternal kingdom, members of His family and the dwelling place of God.

God's people. The New society that Christ has created are to be the demonstration of God in the earth. What ha great privilege and high calling.