

St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

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"The New Man"

Holy Communion
February 10, 2008

The Text: Ephesians 2: 11-22

The New Man

11 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.

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As we turn to the latter part of Ephesians 2 this morning, Paul is further developing two ideas he introduced earlier in this Epistle. He is drawing out the implications of the second blessing bestowed upon the believer, as described in 1:10. There we read:

as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

As we will see in a minute the New Man of 2:11-22 is to foreshadow the unity that Jesus will one day fully inaugurate as all things in heaven and on earth are brought to unity in him. The second idea Paul is developing in these verses is to give a specific example of what he laid out in a more general way in chapter 2:1 – 10.

There we saw Paul discuss these themes:

Our Position Apart from Christ (verses 1-3)

The Gentiles apart from Christ (verses 11-12)

Our Position in Christ (verses 4-7)

The Gentiles Position in Christ (verses 13-16)

The Wonder of Saving Grace." (verses 8-10)

The wonder of saving Grace that unites Jew and Gentile in one family (verses 17-22)

The references in the contrasting blue font represent those verses from our appointed text that parallel the general statement Paul makes in verses 1-10. As we study this letter in more detail we realize how intentional Paul is in the organizing of his material.

Before we move into a study of these three sections I want to say something about the title of the sermon. When we think of a title like "The New Man" we run up against the limitations imposed by language. When we hear a phrase like this we are prompted to think of a male in the singular declension. However this is not what is meant by this at all. Rather it is intended to be understood collectively and includes both men and women. However to have used the phrase, "The New Humanity" does not capture as clearly what Paul is laying out for us here as does the phrase "The New Man." This is because we have to think firstly of Jesus Christ as "The New Man." When those

who are his disciples are joined together in the body of the Church we are His body. Therefore we are to represent in how we live presently an identity that does not see ourselves primarily as a collection of individuals. Rather we are to see ourselves as The New Man, who because of our relationship to Jesus as the one who saves us by grace, are learning to live interdependently with each. This New Man, is like a someone, who having recovered from a near fatal illness is healthy and functioning well because of the healing that has occurred.

Paul will show us the healing that Christ initiates to allow Jew and Gentile to live together as one body, thus forming The New Man which is the idea at the heart of these ten verses. By the time we are through our study this morning we will understand what Paul is saying about the healing that has occurred between Jew and Gentile so that they can now live together in a kind of unity that apart from Christ would be inconceivable.

So let us now take each of the sections of this passage and see what we learn about the difference Christ makes when people are united to him in a new body as The New Man.

Our Position Apart from Christ (verses 1-3)

The Gentiles apart from Christ (verses 11-12)

At verse 11 Paul describes the Gentiles' life apart from Christ when he observes:

11 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.

In verse 11 Paul is depicting for us the animosity the Jews and Gentiles had for each other, epitomized by their name calling as they insulted one another. A Jew could not imagine being un-circumcised and a Gentile would think of circumcision as abhorrent. You would never find a statue of a Greek Male nude with circumcised anatomy. The point Paul is making here is that apart from Christ Jew and Gentile had an almost inexpressible contempt and revulsion, one toward the

other. The Jew derogatorily calling the Gentile the uncircumcised, and the Gentile disdainfully referring to the Jew as the "circumcised."

Every nationality tends to divide the world into two parts -- "them" and "us." The Jews always have looked upon the world of their day as made up of Jews and Gentiles. Anyone not a Jew is a Gentile in the eyes of the Jewish people. The Greeks did the same. There were the Greeks, the "civilized" people, and all the rest were "barbarians." They based that word on the verb *barbar* which means "to stammer." Anyone who didn't speak Greek, the civilized language, sounded to the Greeks like a stuttering child. When the Romans took over the Greek civilization, they adopted the same terminology. Everyone within the Roman Empire was Roman; all others were "barbarians." The Chinese did the same thing. *China* is derived from their word for "middle," for they saw themselves as the center of the earth, the Middle Kingdom. Everyone else lived out on the periphery of the earth.

How true this can still be when we are separated from Christ. As we think of the on-going tragedy that is the Middle East, when we think of how people of different races have so often said things that are sheer vitriol and acted out of that hate, we see one of the lasting effects of people cut off from Jesus Christ. The old man is a racist, bigot, prideful and at enmity with one another.

But this is not all. We also read that for the Gentiles they cut off from the covenant of promise. Notice that Paul does not refer to the Old Testament covenant as covenants of work but of promise. This is because the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic covenants all pointed forward to Jesus, who would fulfill all of the Old Testament promises in his life, death and Resurrection. I like what the 18th century Anglican Charles Simeon wrote about this phrase: The covenant of Promise:

It is called "the covenant of promise," to distinguish it from the covenant of works, which consisted only in requirements; whereas this consists chiefly in promises: under the covenant of works, men were to *do* all; under the covenant of grace they were to *receive* all.¹

¹Simeon, Charles: *Horae Homileticae Vol. 17: Galatians-Ephesians*. London, 1832-63, S. 304

It is worthy of noting that Paul says that when they were cut off from the covenant of promise they were without God and therefore without hope in the world. To be without hope, means that we are ultimately unable to find meaning in life. What a contrast to the hope-filled writing that we have here, particularly in Ephesians one. When we have God in the world we are able to hear Jesus say to us:

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

The Christian is able to have a realistic perspective of life in this world. It is not only troublesome but it can be filled with tribulation. This is a word that expresses the anguish that can accompany our lives as we live for Christ. However we can have hope, we can take heart, we can have courage to carry on because we know that life has a purpose and a destiny that can only be seen and understood in Christ.

As we live in the fullness of what Ephesians is teaching us we are to live under the covenant of grace and therefore guided by the promises of God. Do you rest upon the promises? Do you treasure them up in your minds? Do they plead them in prayer before God? Do you found all your hopes of happiness upon them?

Apart from Christ we are alienated from the grace-filled promises spoken of here. It is to save us from hopelessness and racial bigotry that Paul says Jesus came to save both the Jews and the Gentiles, and indeed us too.

At verses 13-16 Paul talks about the nature of Christ's saving work by showing us the Gentiles' Position in Christ which parallels what Paul had said in verses 4-7 about the saving work of Jesus.

Here is one of the clearest statements in the New Testament about the reconciling Work of Christ. Ephesians has a lot to say about what I would call the theology of glory. But here, as else where, unless we are united with Christ with in His death, covered by his blood, we are unable to share in his Resurrected life.

So, how does Paul show us this reconciliation is established?

Please look to verse 16: There Paul writes:

*“and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross,
thereby killing the hostility.”*

Here Paul talks about how we are reconciled to God. It comes as the hostility, the enmity that exists between God and humanity is killed on the Cross. Paul wants to be clear about this. When we are living apart from Christ we are at enmity with God. This hostility is also then expressed in how we live in relationship to each other as Jew and Gentile. But as we are reconciled to God through the Cross we can in turn be reconciled with each other. Paul says very much the same thing in Romans 5:10 where we read:

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

The word enmity is the same root word as enemies. There is something very important to grasp here. When we are enemies with God it is natural for us to be enemies with one another. However when the soul is being transformed from the inside out we come to recognize that saving grace of Jesus not only unites us to God about allows for a reconciliation with each other. As we back up to verse 15 we see how Paul addresses this new found unity:

*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,*

The Cross marks the end of Old Testament Ceremonial Law. Here Paul is saying that in Christ those Old Testament Temple regulations that safe guarded Israel and kept Gentiles at a distance are no longer necessary. Therefore a certain view of the Ceremonial Law is brought to an end here. This does mean that Paul is abolishing things like the Ten Commandments. In chapter 6 of Ephesians Paul refers to the Ten Commandments when he says:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

Paul is stating clearly in this verse that the 10 Commandments are to be normative for Christians. But what is no longer necessary is the ceremonial law that separated Jews from Gentiles. For an example of who this verse was applied in the New Testament you can study Acts Ten where Peter realizes that he can eat food which had previously been deemed "unclean" This is the directive the Lord gives to the Apostle just before he meets the Gentile Cornelius and shares the Gospel with him.

Because of what the Cross has done to abolish the ceremonial laws and bring to an end the enmity and the hostility that exists between God and humanity we can know the Salvation that is ours in Christ. Listen again to what Paul says about this salvation in verses 13-14:

***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*

Jews and Gentiles called out of their past into union with Christ

1. **Christ Jesus is the place of Salvation**: The Christian is that person whose identity is found in Christ. It is not that in Jesus we find peace but as Paul says in verse 14 he is our peace. There work of Jesus brings about a change in our nature but this can only be experienced when we recognize that we are to live differently now that we are in Christ. He himself is our peace. He is the very embodiment of shalom. If we are to be at peace with each other we need to appropriate for ourselves the one who is Peace, Jesus Christ. Paul will develop the implications of this in the way we live our lives when we get to chapter four. For now I would like to draw your attention to Ephesians 4:24. There we read:

and to put on the new man, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness

Here is reference to this New Man. When we truly appropriate for ourselves what the Cross of Jesus means we are to intentionally live in such away that we are being formed into the very likeness of God. What we need to remember about this idea is that it is primarily to be seen as a corporate likeness. There is to be a quality that the Holy Spirit is shaping within the church that is seeing us embody the righteousness and holiness that exists in the Holy Trinity because we are becoming more like God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2. **Peace to those who are near**, This is Jews. They worshipped in and around the Temple. They need to be called out of their past as surely as the Gentiles do. They need to be called out of works righteousness.
3. **Peace to those who were far away**. These are the Gentiles as verses 11-12 makes clear. Dividing wall of hostility is the wall dividing the court of Gentiles from the Court of Israel. They are kept at a distance. The cleaning of the Temple.
4. **Ephesians 2 does not say Gentiles** drawn into Citizenship of Israel but rather into Corporate Christ

“If the Church in Ephesians 2 stands for the overcoming of that fundamental division of humanity into either Jew and Gentile, it stands for the overcoming of all division caused by tradition, class, colour, nation, or groups of nations.”

As we move to verses 17-22 we see the full embodiment the New Man Paul has been presenting to us. Here are verses that parallel chapter 2:8-10 and speak to us of the Wonder of Saving Grace that unites Jew and Gentile in one family.

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.*

The proclamation of glad tidings of which these verses speak are meant for both Jew and Gentile. The Jews are the ones who are near to God because of their covenantal relationships as seen in the Old Testament. The Gentiles are those who were far off because they had not been part of this community. But now that both Jew and Gentile have heard and received the good news of Christ see what Paul says is the result of this. Through Jesus both Jew and Gentile have access to the Father:

Two negative statements:

***19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,*

Three positive statements:

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.*

The New Temple in the New Testament.

Verses 19-22 Notice the Imagery. The New man of which 15 speaks is built on foundation of prophets and apostles They comprise the foundation and the apostle says, Christ himself is the chief cornerstone. When you build a building, you place the cornerstone. And all the measurements of that building are taken from that cornerstone. Everything relates to it. The whole building ties together because of the cornerstone. The apostle depicts Jesus as having that relationship with us. You notice that, all through this letter, he cannot

forget him a second. Everything is "in Christ," "in him," "by him," "through him," "through his blood," "by his death." Everything comes to us in Christ. If you do not have Jesus, there is no way you can have intimate fellowship with God. "No man comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6), says Jesus. So it is all built on Christ. He is the great cornerstone of our faith. And yet we are all members of it, stones being joined together.

Think about what a stone mason does. He has a pile of stones that have perhaps been gathered in from the hillside. He goes look at these stones, and picks one he thinks is the right size and shape. Then he takes a chisel and hammer and knocks off a piece here and smooths off an edge there, and then places it where he wants it to go. If it doesn't quite fit, he will knock off another piece here and there until it is exactly right. Then he will cement it in place with mortar.

That is exactly the picture Paul has given us here of how God is at work with us. He is knocking off the rough edges, shaping us up, getting us ready. And if he has put you with some people you don't like, it is because they are the chisel he is using to knock off some rough edges. This is no joke; it is exactly what God is doing. He is building a temple, a holy temple -- a beautiful, magnificent building.

I do not know anything that makes sense of history, other than this point of view. To read history apart from this outlook leaves nothing but a meaningless jumble of political campaigns and battles and bloodshed among warring factions. But if you look at history from this point of view you will see that every one of those battles, every one of those campaigns, was part of the process of God -- preparing his people, straightening them out, chiseling a piece here, chipping a piece there, sanding them down, smoothing them out, getting them ready, building them in, fitting them in place in this great temple. And one day, the only thing left of history will be this temple God has built, the church of Jesus Christ. Everything else -- all our great buildings, all our vaunted progress -- will have been lost in the dust of a nuclear storm. The only thing left will be the church of Jesus Christ, the people in whom God dwells.

This is what he is doing with us now -- building us into this temple. What a difference it makes if we begin to understand some of the possibilities and the privileges which are ours! When the temple of Solomon was built, we read in First Kings 6:7,

...it was with stone prepared at the quarry; so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the temple, while it was being built. (1 Kings 6: 7b RSV)

It was a quiet, secret process. Stones were shaped down in the quarry, and then brought up to be fitted into place without the sound of a hammer. This is a beautiful picture of what God is doing with the church of Jesus Christ today. Already we are temples of the living God. Individually, our bodies are the temple of God himself. If we understand that, and the relationship into which it brings us with God as King and Father, what a great resource we have to draw upon!