

Ephesians 13-11-17b

We pick up our study now in Ephesians, chapter 2, and we have been paying attention to our pronouns. This is the kind of thing that English majors live for, is subject-verb agreement, you know, the little pieces that make sentences and phrases stick together and work. And as we have seen time and time and time again, you cannot tease apart the details of Scripture to any extent that will cause the thought to break down.

The more attention you pay to detail, the more you learn, the more is revealed. It is, there is no microscope you can place the Word of God under that is going to cause it to lose resolution and become fuzzy and unclear. The more carefully we look, the more it rewards our attention and our diligence with insight and with understanding.

Now it is one thing to see these things. We saw one of the greatest chiasms of all time on Friday night, I thought. These things just smack me in the head and make me go down on my knees before God in thanks that He has condescended to reveal His truth to us.

You know the lyrics of that song, At the Cross, and it talks about such a worm as I. And I think God has taken an earthworm experiment and He has chosen to promote and sanctify and glorify the worms in the experiment into the realm of service and the beauty and the opportunities and the tremendous things that are ours in Christ are just beyond imagination. Why God did these things for us, I cannot figure out. It's a good thing that none of us are God because our impatience would have worn thin a long time ago and we would have said, you know what, I think a thought, it's all gone, I can erase the memory of human race from the angels, nobody will ever know I did it.

I can just get rid of the whole problem, I don't have to put up with them, I don't have to be insulted and importuned and put out by all of this disobedience and lack of appreciation and apathy and there's nothing that can get you so in vibration mode as lack of appreciation when you've really put yourself out. And God is the ultimate example of this, but look at what He does for us and that's what Paul is getting across in these verses. He Himself, verse 14 of Ephesians 2, He Himself, Jesus Christ, and once again this resounding, redounding, repeating emphasis on the Lord Jesus Christ, in Him, in Him, in Him.

Do you come to appreciate the magnificence and the magnitude of God revealing Himself and providing salvation for all of us, those who were far off and those who were near in Christ? Paul is stretching the limits of the Greek language which are even greater than the limits, I mean there's more space and more room to maneuver in Greek than there is in English. Greek is probably the most expressive and the most incisive and particular and definitive language that has ever existed on earth and I think that's why God brought the Greek language to its peak right at the time of Christ. I've said this before, I've often thought what a happy thing it is that Dr. W.A. Criswell who was preaching at First Baptist Church, he did a lot of wonderful preaching and when

he came to First Baptist in the 1940s he would literally preach the shingles off of that roof.

He went high and wide and loud and fast and was detailed and exegetical and prepared so much and he tried to fit it all in. But recording technology, the ability to preserve his sermons in audio form came in in the early 1950s and it wasn't until the early 1970s that the videos pick up. He was on television before but none of those videos have survived.

But the biblicity if I can use that word, the Bible content in his sermons is really great and God chose to time his career and the progress of technology to the point where recording would come in and preserve his preaching I think right as he hit his peak. It's just a wonderful, I see it every day, I think how great this is that here's a man of God diligently preparing and presenting these sermons and God brought along really excellent recording technology just at the right time to preserve them. It's just a God thing.

God wanted to make a ministry out of preserving these sermons and the confluence in the larger purposes of God is really remarkable to me. In the same way I think or maybe that's an illustration of a profounder truth that in the Old Testament days God preserved and produced the Hebrew language and I say preserved because I think as I've told you before that it was the original language. I think when God confounded languages all of your Proto-Asiatic and Indo-European languages and things had their inception as diminishments and departures from Hebrew.

When the Bible says, God said, let there be Yahi or let there be light, I think that's exactly what He said. I think God spoke creation into existence, this earthly creation certainly in Hebrew. The Bible says that's what He said, I think that's what He said.

And Hebrew is such a beautiful and expressive language for the kinds of things that are expressed in the Old Testament. I wouldn't want to see the Old Testament in Greek. We have the Septuagint but I hardly ever look at it because only if there's a real textual problem of some sort that we're trying to solve because Hebrew is so beautiful and so expressive.

Then when you come to the New Testament you come to the intricacies and the details of what God did in Christ, forensically, judicially, legally, spiritually, physically, the incisive, detailed specificity of Greek is perfect for expressing these very advanced truths. So you have the beauty in the poetry in the Old Testament, the summary of thousands of years of history expressed in that great language. It's just perfect.

There's no language that could even come close to matching Hebrew for the Old Testament truths that it reveals and communicates, and then Greek. And in this Greek language the details matter. That's the reason God put it in Greek, the details matter.

And the beautiful case system and the specific definitions of prepositions and it's just, you can't, if you have any sensitivity at all to language, once you start learning Greek you just, to me, you could never learn enough of it. It's just a beautiful, beautiful language for getting at these truths.

So we're paying attention to what Paul does by way of using this language to communicate truth.

And we've seen, and I would certainly suggest to you, it isn't anything I trust and hope and am sure that somebody somewhere has drawn out this distinction before, but it's not in the common commentaries. But it so clarifies, at least in my mind, what Paul is getting at here in Chapter 2. What God did in and through Israel by way of demonstration, what God allowed to happen outside Israel in those ancient days, those who at the point of God consciousness, conviction by the Holy Spirit said, no, I'm not interested. God said, fine.

You're assigned to the kingdom of the prince of the power of the air, and he can use you, since that's your choice, to try to make his system work. He says he can be like the Most High, he can raise his throne even above the stars, he can run a universe, he can run civilizations, he can produce systems of society that will function apart from me and apart from my life and my principles. Try it out.

Go ahead. Knock yourself out. And I'll give you all the people who opt out of my salvation and my deliverance.

And in the Old Testament days, all the people who opted in, God predestined them to be born in or near Israel so that they could be a part of that covenant plan and promise. God didn't let people who were going to be positive and interested and craving and hungry and thirsting after God to be born in ancient China. What sense would that make? He's God.

He can make sure they're born in or near Israel where they can be instructed and be given those things that they need. He just conveniently organized it because there wasn't communication of a worldwide nature. There wasn't the kind of media and access by way of travel and so on that we have today.

So logistically, God just saved Himself a lot of trouble. He didn't have to detail angels all over the world to give individual Bible classes to people in Borneo and Fiji and the Solomon Islands and Alaska and all these other far off places. He said, look, I'll just put everybody in one spot.

I'll deal with them corporately. All Israel shall be saved. Why? Because they're all positive.

I can say that because I put them all in that one vineyard. I hedged my vineyard around. I plowed it.

I planted it. I put in a tower. I put my grapes, my vines, all in one place where I could tend them.

And the rest of the world is outside. Well, this is the distinction that Paul is pointing to historically. At one time, he says, you once walked according to the course of this world.

We all once conducted ourselves in times past. This is before Pentecost. This is before the change in dispensation.

This is the way God had organized everything. But now, He Himself, verse 14, is our peace, has made both one, broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished it. And this is so important because you don't make distinctions based on background, heredity, or Jewishness or anything else in this age.

And people have asked me many times over the years, and you see it, there's always a question, well, but God's chosen people. Doesn't being Jewish or having an Israelite background, doesn't that still sort of mark you out as special in this age? No! Not one particle of specialness whatsoever, if you have a Jewish heritage, an Israelite, your name is Kohen, your name is Goldstein, or whatever, makes no difference whatsoever. Read the Scripture.

What does Paul say? That was then, this is now. He has broken down the middle wall of separation. Everybody is now near.

Why? The world has turned. The Roman Empire, beginning with the Great and going through to and through the Romans, connected the world. That was the beginning of what we now see culminating in the Electronic Age where there's no place that's far off, except some place that doesn't have Internet.

The world is being drawn together. Well, the first time that happened was in the days of Alexander and on down into the days of the Caesars. The Roman road system united the civilized world and made communication and travel.

Look at the travels of the Apostle Paul. Two thousand years ago, the guy is all over the map. Look how small they have to shrink the map to fit the travels of Paul, his first, second, and third missionary journeys.

You can't even hardly see Israel on those maps. You look at those big arcs, here's all the places Paul went. It's because of Rome.

It's because of the Greek language. It's because the world shrank right at that time. The Lord Jesus came at the culmination of the ages.

And so since then, God has changed the dispensation. He prepared the logistics of it, the communication aspects of it, and He no longer needed to segregate and congregate people who were going to be positive in one place. That was no longer necessary.

Now, He could scatter them further out. Now you can find them where they live. He's not going to deal in a nation and have a single little hedged in thing anymore.

It's ubiquitous. It's worldwide. And so God, in His omniscience, began to plant these positive people further and further from Palestine, further and further from the Jordan River, further and further from Jerusalem, and they were reachable.

So now there are people who are going to respond up in Asia Minor. There are people who are going to respond in Gaul. There are people who are going to be responding throughout Asia Minor and on around down into Egypt.

And the locus expands, and the more commerce and trade and communication and travel expanded, the more freely God could distribute positive people and begin to sprinkle them throughout so that now there is no place where the gospel is not available. There is literally no place where the gospel is not available now. And this was the Lord Jesus' prediction.

When you see the gospel preached to the whole earth, that's when the time of the end is going to come. Guess what? It has never been as true as it is today. Just in the last few decades, that condition has been met.

It's exciting because Jesus said this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the world. You cannot find a place... You know how they now have the coverage maps for Verizon versus AT&T, and they say, you know, look at 4G coverage, and it makes a map of the United States where the competition, they say, well, is that a Rorschach blot or something? But you see that thick red coverage for Verizon all over the nation? Well, think globally. In fact, I know a guy who has used petroleum mapping technology to make a map of the world and show in brighter and brighter colors the prevalence of the gospel, and there are so few dark spots on that map.

If you want to come over, I can show it to you. The thing is huge. It's wall size.

It's rolled up. It stands about this high. And when you unroll that thing, it is a map of the world.

And using the same software they used to show where petroleum and natural gas and so on are, he's used it to map where the gospel is being preached and where the reach and scope of Bible teaching and evangelism has been able to reach. And the thing, if you did the Verizon deal, you could easily see all of the continents mapped out. There's just very few little dark spots.

This is what Jesus spoke of. When you see the gospel being preached throughout the world, that's when the time of the end will come. Well, it has never been true like it is true now.

But it began here. And so Paul says, God has broken down that middle wall of separation. This is a new dispensation.

You've got to break away from thinking in those old separatist terms. Well, as I said, it's one thing to note a beautiful structure, a beautiful symmetry, or a wonderful truth in the Word of God, and it opens it and reveals it. But we want to move to the point of answering the question, so what? All right, I get it.

He's talking to these people and they're still trying to, you know, it's the first few generations of the church. They're having trouble shaking the old paradigm, thinking that, well, you've got to come to Israel to be saved. And you've got the Judaizers saying, well, shouldn't they be circumcised?

Shouldn't we have them, you know, refrain from meat offered to idols? And I mean, shouldn't we, you know, shouldn't we still retain some of the old structure? And Paul says, no, that middle wall of partition has been broken down.

Well, that, you can understand the problem back in those days, but do we have that problem today? Does anybody seriously think, hey, no pork for me and I'm not going to let the curls grow down the corner and not shave the edges of my beard and, you know, the Mosaic law? We don't really don't have much of that problem today, do we? So what does this mean to us? Why do we care that Paul is making this distinction, illustrating this distinction, and showing how it is resolved and eliminated and everyone is unified in Christ? Well, there is still division in the body of Christ. It's just not based on Jew versus Gentile, right? How many denominations are there? Have you ever, you know, I've got one because I was in seminary. I bought this handbook of denominations, and you look in the index, you know, A, B, C, D, and I went through and counted them one time, and there were 430-something separate denominations just in that book, and that was published 25, 30 years ago.

Separate denominations all claiming to be Christian, not to mention your cults, your Mormons and, you know, another gospel of Jesus Christ and your Jehovah's Witnesses and the New World Translation and the other offshoot, well, you know, we believe in Jesus, but we, you know, He wasn't the Son of God. He didn't do any miracles. We use the Jefferson Bible, you know, whatever.

There is all of these offshoots and divisions. And, of course, in Corinthians Paul says, I hear that there are wars and divisions among you. It shouldn't be that way.

But if you move to a new town and you say, well, I want to find a local church, what do you have to do? You open up what used to be the Yellow Pages. Now you go online and Google your town and church. Well, you get the Methodists, you get the Baptists, you get the Presbyterians, you get the Episcopalians, you get the Unitarians, and you think, well, I've got to pick one.

And where do we always go? Well, go to the Bible. Who says they're a Bible church? I don't want a denominational church. I just want a Bible church.

Well, Bible church is now sort of an unofficial denomination because, well, we define ourselves by what we're not. It's like being an atheist. This is what I'm not.

I'm not a Methodist. I'm not a Baptist. I'm not a Presbyterian.

You know, and you say, well, we go with the Bible. Well, listen, there are eyebrow-raising, chest-clutching versions of Bible churches. You go there and think, holy smokes.

Cowboy church is a non-denominational quote-unquote Bible church. Try going to a cowboy church. So that's not a reliable indicator either.

So how do you, well, why are there these divisions? And should you automatically say, oh, well, I mean, should we consider all? Should we just go down the list? Because, hey, don't want to be making divisions. God's broken down the middle wall of partition. The two should be one.

What are we really talking about here? This distinction, Jew and Gentile, Paul says, was really a God thing that was designed to show that there's not as much difference as you think. The outsiders were powerless in the grip of evils in the air. The insiders were powerless in the grip of evils that were internal.

We were all children of wrath, Paul says. Everybody was a child of wrath. Verse 3, we were by nature children of wrath just as the others.

We really weren't any better off. We made this distinction, but it's really artificial. Well, I'm a Jewish child of wrath.

You're a Gentile child of wrath. Ho, ho, ho. Let me, you know, strut around in my superiority.

You're just as big a child of wrath as the other guy. So there never was a basis, and God never intended the distinction to be one of arrogance or one of put-down. Did Jesus avoid Samaria when He traveled between Galilee and Jerusalem? It says He must needs go through Samaria.

Why? Because God never intended that distinction to be fueled by arrogance and better-than-thou-ness. And the same is true here. When Paul says, we were by nature children of wrath just as the others, he says there never was.

This is a distinction without superiority. This is a very valuable principle, don't you think? Look at marriage. There is a distinction between the husband and the wife.

Is there any basis for arrogance or superiority, much less abuse or servitude on the one hand and lordly indifference on the other? Is there any basis because there is a distinction for arrogance or for maltreatment? Were the Jews justified in discriminating against and treating like dirt the Samaritans? No. And Jesus pointed that out. Look at the parable of the good Samaritan.

He said, look, there are a lot of Samaritans that have a better heart than you. Look at the priest and the guys walking on the other side of the road from the guy in the ditch. And it was a Samaritan who had pity, who dug into his purse, who made sure the guy got care and was looked after.

It was a Samaritan because he said, you know what, in the heart it's all about what you choose. So one lesson I think we can draw from this by way of application is to be careful about thinking that because we are on one side or the other of some given line that there is any basis for feeling superior or feeling better than thou or for looking down upon or denigrating or assigning less value to others. Christ died for the sins of the whole world.

He's the propitiation for our sins, but not for ours only, also for the sins of the whole world. Jesus rather prophetically embedded a truth when He was talking to Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel in John 3, and He said, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He didn't say God so loved Israel.

You can see Paul making a distinction here. God sent Jesus Christ to Israel first and foremost and primarily, but always in the back of God's mind. In the mystery that wasn't revealed until after Pentecost, God all along intended to make salvation available to the world and it would spread beyond Israel.

God knew that all along. But like any good storyteller, like any good teacher, God didn't lay all His cards on the table at the beginning. You never give the punch line to a good story at the beginning.

It robs all the interest out of it. Have you ever listened to Paul Harvey? I don't know if they still replay him or not. But many times he'll be telling a story and he purposely doesn't give you the name and you say, I can't wait to find out who this is he's talking about.

This is a really interesting story. Who is he talking about? And you hang on every word and you absorb all the details waiting to find out who is he talking about. And then at the end he tells you and it's like, ah, I see.

Wow, how interesting. Well, that's just a principle of good storytelling. It's what God does.

And God purposely withheld some of these things. He still withholds things. What do the seven thunders say in Revelation? We don't know.

I'm really, really anxious to find out, but we don't know. God has not revealed that yet. God didn't reveal the fullness of His salvation to the Gentiles, to Old Testament Israel.

They had their hands full trying to exploit their own salvation without worrying about what was going to happen in the future with the Gentiles. So Paul makes that point here. And I would suggest that application wise when you say, okay, I see Paul talking about we who were near and you who were far off have all been brought together and made one in Christ and reconciled.

What is Paul's point? He is our peace. And just like the Ten Commandments that we saw in O.S.'s book this morning, there is the vertical aspect of peace. We have peace with God through Christ, and we have peace with one another through Christ.

What do you have that you did not receive? On what basis can we get too upset with anybody else? There but for the grace of God go I. Anytime we see a failure, anytime we look at the government, anytime we look at people in our near or far periphery, anytime we see frustrations and we see inadequacies and inelegancies and willful acts of heinous disregard and selfishness and manifestations of our corrupt nature, our flesh, the influence of the world around us, we see it

and we hate it, we look at these awful things, the first thing that ought to come to our mind is, you know what, the Lord Jesus Christ came to address that in everybody. Just because I am someone who is near, because I am in the faith and in the church and have a Bible and have a notebook and have done these things, am I any less in need of salvation than those that are far off? I am made out of that same mud. I will return to that same dust when I die.

I am no different. The only thing that distinguishes me is the extent to which God's grace has been allowed to act. That's the only difference.

Now therefore, verse 19, Ephesians chapter 2, now, having observed all of this, having seen it, Paul, having drawn it out, now therefore you, you Gentiles, are no longer strangers and foreigners. You Gentiles, that we Jews used to look down our nose at and call unwashed and unclean and uncircumcised, you are fellow citizens with the saints. Who are the saints in this context? The sanctified of Israel.

Saints here has a limited application. You are fellow citizens with the saints, those who were already sanctified in God's former sanctifying economy. How could you get sanctified in Old Testament days? Come to Israel.

Do the ablutions. Follow the rituals. Worship the God of Israel.

Come into that economy. Come into that fold. You are now fellow citizens with the saints and you are fellow members of the household of God.

It used to be the household of God was only Israel. Now you have joined that fellowship. Having been built, having been built, not being built, not will be built, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

The foundation begins with the apostles and reaches back to the prophets. The apostles are the ones revealing this new Church Age truth, this mystery doctrine. But the foundation is a combination of the two.

Now, there is immediately a danger and any systematic theology guy immediately sees red flags attached to a metronome clicking back and forth, wait, watch, wait, watch. Is the church the new Israel? Has Israel just been broadened out? Israel was the church all along and now the church is just a broadened Israel. You are now fellow citizens.

You are fellow saints. You are fellow members of the household of God. So the church is really just a broadened Israel and stuff that was given to Israel in the past just pertains to the church.

It has just been expanded. That is not what Paul is saying. Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

This is what negates and obviates that difficulty because Israel was not built on the cornerstone

of the Lord Jesus. Israel was built on the cornerstone of the promises of God to the patriarchs and expanded on the foundation of the law of Moses. Expanded further adding to the edifice with the prophets and the writings.

But this new citizenship, this new fellowship, this new thing that is created out of the two earlier parts, the chief cornerstone is Christ. And so this particular edifice did not exist before Christ, could not exist before Him because He is the starting stone. He is the stone that determines the position, location and orientation of the whole rest of the building.

He is the chief cornerstone in whom the whole building being fitted together grows. Now you have your present tense. It is growing with each generation.

It began with Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone and it is growing into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. A dwelling place of God.

It is a beautiful picturing. It is a beautiful summary of everything that is taking place and it is a reminder to us that there is a purpose in these things. God wasn't just killing some time.

I think I'll make a human race. I'll call some of them Jews and send Moses up the mountain, have him bring some stones down and let them wander around. I'll put a pillar of cloud, pillar of fire, do a few miracles, startle people from time to time and it will be fun.

Let's just have a lark. Let's just have a project, a little afternoon entertainment, kind of like a video game for the angels. We'll just set the thing up.

We'll run it. When it's done it isn't casual. It isn't off the cuff.

God, before the foundation of the world, carefully planned, organized, beautifully constructed the unfolding of His plan and purpose and it is first and foremost and ultimately a self-revelation. They always talk about in art and in literature when you examine the creative works of people it tells you something about them. That's what creation is.

It tells us something about God. The glory of God is there not to shine in a vacuum but to be appreciated. You can't look at these things with genuine understanding without appreciating God.

What a great God He is. He could be anything and nobody could stop Him. He could be arbitrary.

He could be whimsical. He could be unpredictable. He could be fickle.

He could say one thing one day and say something else the other day. Who would stop Him? Is it not great that God is consistent, that He is just, that He is loving, that He is merciful because He chooses to be. He could literally be and do anything and nobody could stop Him and nobody could question.

Anybody raises a question, vaporized. Anybody sins, vaporized. Anybody has any contrary thought, any second guess, vaporized.

God has a universe full of yes persons, yes angels, yes men. Anybody says anything but yes, instant vaporization. Why doesn't He do that? Well it isn't because you and I are stopping Him.

It's because of who He is and we ought to be grateful. We ought to appreciate. Do you not appreciate people who are consistent, people who are loyal, people who are faithful, people who are you can count on in the crunch? That's something to appreciate.

It's a pale reflection of who God is. And people who quietly do what they do because they recognize that it's right, not because they want to be recognized or want to be appreciated or expecting a big thank you. They do it because it's right.

God does what He does because it's right. We appreciate these pale reflections in and among ourselves. Do we remember to thank God for who and what He is, for His mercy and His grace and His generosity in sharing with us these things? Such a worm as I, God has taken time and great pains to reveal to me who He is.

He cares enough about me to disclose Himself, to put His Spirit within me so that I can have some just beginning understanding of these eternal truths. And He's going to promote all of us so that we can have an even greater understanding in the future. So is that not motivating? Is it not encouraging to try to be and to do those things that God has laid out before us, to be worth the trouble so to speak? That's what Paul is going to go on to say.

The whole building is being fitted together, growing into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place. You're not far off anymore. What was the dwelling place in Old Testament days? Tabernacle? Temple? The occasional fiery mountain? The occasional pillar of cloud and fire? What is it now? It's us.

God is making us a temple, making us a tabernacle. He wants to tabernacle in us, not even just among us, in us. How great is that? To which of the angels said He at any time, I want to dwell in you? We have no indication that that's ever taken place.

Can you imagine the jealousy so to speak of an angel who has been dwelling in God's presence and has been observing God? And here's these minor, outside the commonwealth of heaven, strangers from all of the civilization and social relationships in God's presence. Here are these, to the angels, we're the Gentiles and they're the Jews. And that middle wall of partition has not just been broken down between Jew and Gentile, it is being broken down between heaven and earth.

He is the mediator, He spans that gulf. We are not just Gentiles being added to the earthly commonwealth, we are humans being added to the heavenly commonwealth. It's not just horizontal, it's vertical and all of these things are in Christ.

How appreciative should we be of the Lord Jesus and what He has done for us? The more we think about these things, I think the more expansive and all-encompassing our appreciation will be. And when we have that appreciation, when we look at each other, the middle wall of partition is going to dissolve. And any sense of superiority or better-than-thou-ness is going to disappear because we have all been brought near in Christ.

And it is humbling, it is transformational. And that's why Paul put it in this letter. That's why God the Holy Spirit inspired these truths to be given to us, to change us.

Not just to impress us, but to change us, to make us more Christ-like in that Philippians 2 sense. We'll close here with a word of prayer. Next time we'll embark on Ephesians 3. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You for the divine power that You have invested in these pages, able not only to teach us but to transform us by the renewing of our minds so that we can perceive Your will and be equipped and enabled to carry it out. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will make these things real to us, will not let us forget them or ignore them, that they will be constantly in our minds and in our hearts to draw us closer to You, to conform us more closely to the example and the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in His name and for His glory.

Amen.