

Ephesians 13-12-15b

We resume our study now in Ephesians and we're rapidly approaching the end of chapter 2. But let's pick up here in verse 16 where the purpose of the Lord Jesus coming and specifically His death on the cross and bearing our sins in His own body on the tree is one of the multiple purposes of this is to end the separation, the isolation, the segregation if you will of believers in Israel and spread the gospel and the people of the gospel, the people of faith, people who belong to Christ throughout the world. And it is a new kind of demonstration. When you think of the complexity and the sophistication of God's demonstration of the contrast between who He is and what He does and who Satan is and what Satan does, Satan had centuries, had millennia to demonstrate the best that he could do with complete domination.

Why would God make Satan the God of this world? Did you ever puzzle over that? The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. And you think, wow, Satan has blinded the minds so that people just can't get to Christ. Not at all.

Whose minds have been blinded? The God of this world hath blinded the minds of whom? Them that believe not. They have approached that point. They have said, I'm not interested.

God says, fine. Read Romans chapter 1. God gives them over. They suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

They exchange the glory of God for that of creatures and four-footed this and idols and whatnot. They consciously choose a way. God does not wall it off.

God does not allow Satan to blind anybody who would otherwise have come to the truth. Just the reverse. The God of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not, and He has done so ever since history began, in the generations that began with Seth and Cain.

Cain, in my view, as you probably remember, is a believer, but he is a disobedient and rejecting believer. Does Cain not believe in God? God spoke to him for crying out loud. How could he not believe in God? He appeals to God.

He prays to God and says, what are you going to do? Everybody's going to seek my life. And God says, I'll make a provision for you. God makes a covenant with Cain and says, I will protect you.

There's a covenant of provision and protection between God and Cain. How can you say? Well, people do. People think, well, he's the archetypal unbeliever.

He may be a disinterested and faithless believer, much like the Israelites who came out under the blood of the Passover lamb and ate manna and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and fell

short of the promised land. Are those people unbelievers? What does the author of Hebrews say? These did not mix the promises of God with faith. Isn't that what Cain did? He didn't mix the promises of God with faith.

God talks to him and says, look, if you do well, you'll be accepted. Is he going to say that to an unbeliever? If you do well, if you are obedient, you'll be accepted? Was there some sort of salvation by works for Cain? If you do well, you'll be... Who is accepted when they do well? Believers, people who already have a relationship with God. Now your level of acceptance and access and blessing and fellowship is contingent on how obedient you are.

Cain's a believer in my view. I am alone. The rest of the world says what Dixie says.

I don't think so. But this separation, this distinction has been erased, has been eliminated in Christ. He has abolished in His flesh the enmity which was expressed, which was exposed in the law of commandments and ordinances.

People either came to Israel and chose to keep and accept those ordinances and try to live in their light, avail themselves of the cleansing grace of atonement in ritual sacrifice, which was a symbol and a representative shadow of what would be fulfilled, in this case, in the Lord Jesus Christ, expressed right here in our passage. He creates in Himself one new man from the two. This new man is the body of Christ.

Now, I ask you this question, are you ready? So what? I am not a Gentile in the first century. I'm not a Greek. I'm not a Roman.

I'm not some peripheral guy looking over at Israel and saying, oh, well, Pentecost happened and now there's a whole different thing. So what? All of this stuff that we've just covered, all this in Christ, everything, chapter 1, chapter 2, so what? What difference does it make? What do we know now that we didn't know before we came to Ephesians? What difference should it make now that we didn't already kind of know the difference because we've been around a while as believers? What difference does it make? What is the point of all of this for the initial hearers? These people were in that first generation. They did have a very strong sensibility of what it was like to be ostracized because of your flesh.

Gentiles didn't like the Jews because of their circumcised flesh and their notions that they were superior and righteous. You haven't lived until you've been accused of being holier than thou. Well, you just think you're better than the rest of us, don't you? Right? Who do you think you are? You think you're better than us? You think you've got something going? You're smarter? People just hate you because you've got something they want or you're in a position of authority that they don't have or you're just trying to do a job and somebody else has said, hey, good job and now they resent you.

A lot of times it's not even any malice of forethought. People just take a dislike to you and there's

enmity and it's in the flesh. It's got something to do with circumstance or accomplishment or position or inheritance or whatever it may be.

Somebody on the other side looking out. Well, you're not one of us. You don't wear the right clothes.

You don't drive the right car. You don't look the right way. You don't do what we do.

You don't talk like we talk. You don't go where we go. You're not in the clique.

You're not in the inner circle. You're an outsider. And this particularly happens if you're a believer and you have standards and you start mingling with people who have disregarded those standards or willfully trampled those standards and they have a moral persuasion that is different from yours.

They resent your presence because men love darkness rather than light when their deeds are evil. And if you've got any light in your existence, people are going to find you repugnant. I don't like having them around.

And, of course, they're not going to say because I feel convicted about what I'm doing. It's just abrasive. It's off-putting.

I like to be around people who are just as murky and muddy in their moral persuasions as I am. And I like to do this, that, and the other. And I like to have this and that as a part of my lifestyle.

And all the people I hang out with are comfortable. And many times it is an obstacle to repentance and to growth for people who are trying to come out of an immoral background. And the light and the cleanliness is difficult to adjust to.

And people have to be very careful to not over-emphasize the contrast because you become impossible to join. It's impossible for someone who is coming out of a dark place to be comfortable because of just who you are and what you represent. And there is a transition.

And it requires prayer and sensitivity to not over-brighten the lights. Somebody walking out of a dark room, you don't flip on your central six-bulb, 300-watt light fixture. Turn it up slowly.

Give them a little chance to adjust. Don't demand instant sanctification. Don't demand instant change of mind.

Be flexible. Be sensitive. If somebody is moving in the right direction, nobody likes going, in my experience, nobody likes going from blackness of darkness to intense, brilliant white light.

It hurts your eyes. And we need to be careful to be welcoming. And as those who allegedly know more and have gotten further, on which side should the flexibility be? Should the new, freshly repentant person be all flexible and willing to put up with us? Or should we be flexible and willing

to encourage and bring them along, even though there may be things that they haven't gotten to yet, things they haven't learned yet? You know, a toddler with a freshly changed diaper, do you instantly expect them to act like an adult or be potty trained? You know, there is a need on the part of those who have experienced more of God's grace, perhaps for a longer period of time, to bear with those who are weaker, those who are less far along, and to be gentle and to be encouraging.

Think about it this way. If somebody who is looking around, they're in the darkness and they're discontent and they're looking for God and they're trying to find peace and they're trying to find what they know in their heart they need in terms of relationship with God, if they look at us, are we something they don't want to be and a place they don't want to go? Well, whatever the truth is, it can't be that, because look at the lack of joy and look at the priggish stick-in-the-muddiness that that is. I wouldn't want to be one of those, but that can't be right.

Who would want to be one of those people? Who would want to be in that group? We don't want to be that. Now, there is a difference between men loving darkness rather than light when their deeds are evil, but somebody who is seeking and somebody who is looking should find us, as I've said before, Dr. Griswold had this very unusual sermon title called The Attractive Christ, attract like a magnet, to draw. If I be lifted up, I will draw all men.

If we are the body of Christ on earth, and by the way, this is the answer to the question so what, if we are the body of Christ, Jesus said, what part of Christ was lifted up so that all men would be drawn? What was lifted up on the cross? His soul? What did people see when they looked at the cross? His body. We are His body, and if He is going to draw all men, we are now that light. We are that, if somebody wants to escape the darkness, they're going to look for the light.

Well, you and I should shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, and we cannot afford the luxury of being egotistical, self-righteous, vindictive, setting false standards. I suggest to you an interesting piece of documentary. It's called, I believe it's called Trophy Children.

Trophy Children. It is a documentary. It's a full-length thing.

I saw a shorter excerpt and commentary on it, but it's called Trophy Children, and it is a depiction of several different parent-child sets. There is a young and looks like formerly varsity athlete black man who has a son in high school playing football. There is another man who's got a daughter, very young daughter, maybe six or seven, playing golf.

There is a woman who's got two sons, and they are learning to play tennis, and it is the realm of parents encouraging and coaching their children in sports, and there are several different sets. And it is very convicting to watch. It reminds me of Nathan telling David the story about the man who had a visitor, and instead of slaying one of his own sheep, went and took the poor man's

only lamb and slaughtered that for his guest, where David couldn't see what he was doing until it was shown in a different context using different characters.

You can see things in others that you don't see in yourself. If you get a chance to find this and watch it, I'm sure it's available somewhere in some form, and I think it's playing right now on some of the cable services, but find it and watch it. If you have kids or not, it is a great window into how myopic we can get when we think we're right, and we think we're doing a good thing, and the justifications that we use in our own minds and that we offer to others, and look at the faces of the kids who are torn, in some cases almost shredded, between their inbuilt desire to please their parents, their inability to meet the standard that some of these parents set, the arguments and the points that are being made by these parents.

There's nothing more dangerous than somebody who is sure that he is right, and I think I and perhaps others can speak from experience on this. It is a dangerous thing to be convinced in your own mind that you're absolutely and utterly right, but there's nothing like watching this film to see it, and it is a reminder to me what is the application of the fact that we are in Christ and that God in Christ has broken down the enmity, the separation, the distinction where, well, I'm better than you, you're no better than me, there's us and them, I have reasons for thinking ill of you or less of you or separating from you, I've got good reasons and I'm sure that I am right. It's a dangerous, dangerous thing.

The Lord Jesus Christ died, paid the price of His blood and has made both, one, has broken down the middle wall of separation, not just between Jew and Gentile, between man and woman, between any two people. If you are in Christ, we are a new creation. Old things are passed away, all things are new.

We have to look at relationships in a different way. We look at particularly relationships within the body of Christ a different way. He has abolished in His flesh the enmity.

He has made peace. Look how many times the word peace is in here. He Himself is our peace.

He has unified the two. He has broken down the separation. He has abolished in His flesh the enmity.

He has created one new man, thus making peace. He has reconciled. What would be the theme of verses 14-18 here? Unity and peace, lack of division, lack of separation, lack of a reason to throw stones.

Reconciliation. And He came, verse 17, and preached peace to you who were far off and to those who were near. He came and proclaimed peace.

He proclaimed it. Through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now therefore, verse 19.

Anytime you see a now therefore, this is where you're going to be watching for application, watching for the consequence. You Gentiles, He's still maintaining the application of these pronouns, second person plural, you plural. Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners.

Now who's Paul talking to here? Just the Gentiles? It's also the Jews, right? Any Jews, under the sound of his voice here, the Gentiles are no longer strangers. They are no longer foreigners. They are fellow citizens with the sanctified ones.

Fellow citizens. Fellow citizens of Israel? Is the church age just an expansion of Israel? No. They're fellow citizens with the sanctified ones and members of the household of God.

Formerly, there were fleshly bodies that were either in Israel or outside of Israel, either circumcised or uncircumcised. The body of Christ dwells in the household of God. Much better place to be.

Household of God. Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Now, is this New Testament, Old Testament, apostles and prophets? I don't think so.

1 Corinthians 12.28, God has appointed these in the church. Again, 1 Corinthians 12.28, God has appointed these in the church. First, apostles.

Second, prophets. Ephesians 3.5, coming up in a few verses. In other ages, it was not made known to the sons of men.

It has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets. These are New Testament prophets. What did the prophets do? They proclaimed what had not yet been set down as Scripture, church age truth.

Prophets were those who declared. The apostles and prophets had the authority to declare church age truth, to reveal it, to teach it, to expose it, to distribute it, to disseminate it, to proclaim it. Apostles and prophets.

So, this body of Christ, this household of God, is built on the foundation of the newly revealed truth. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Christ. Let every man be careful how he builds.

Jesus Christ Himself is the chief corner, the head of the corner. The chief cornerstone is fine here. In whom the whole building being fitted together.

It doesn't fit itself together. It is being fitted together. Who's doing the fitting here? If this is a passive verb, who's the subject? Who's doing the fitting? Of course, there is no subject for a, you know, the actor for a passive verb.

You just have the object receiving the action. Who is doing the fitting? Who put you here at this

time? Who assigned your family? Who assigned your place of birth, your time of birth? Who put you where you are right now, in relation to whatever other believers are in your periphery? It's God. Specifically, God the Holy Spirit, as we will see.

The whole building being fitted together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In whom you also. In whom? Who's the whom? The Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

In whom you are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. This is the corporate dwelling place. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

That's a personal indwelling. Here, believers are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Now, the last phrase in chapter 2 is in the Spirit.

We had things that were done in the flesh, in His body. This is in and by the Spirit. So, what is the import of all this? We get up, we fold up our Bibles, we go home, we have lunch, we go into the afternoon, figure out if the cowboys are going to beat the Packers and so on.

So what? Are there any of us who do not know or have contact with, fellowship with, relationship with other believers? I would venture to say that in some way, shape or form, all of us have contact with one another. What difference does this make when we think about, when we have an attitude toward, when we have conversation with, when we discuss plans and objectives and goals and situations? Does this insight, does this picture make a difference in the respect that we have for each other? Do we look at each other the way God does? Do we look at ourselves as body of Christ, sanctified ones, fellow citizens, a part of the large purpose of God to show forth His glory? How flexible should we be? How forgiving in long suffering should we be? How willing to sacrifice should we be? What is the second great commandment? Love your neighbor, love one another. What did Jesus say was the new commandment? What's the difference between the new commandment and the second great commandment? The new commandment I give unto you, Jesus says, that ye love one another as I have loved you.

How did Jesus Christ love us? He died so that we could be His body, risen, glorified, sanctified, having paid the penalty to be built into a holy temple, a dwelling place for God. So how important is it to be careful in our interpersonal relationships, our treatment of one another, our attitudes and our words toward one another? How quick to forgive should we be? How long-suffering and patient should we be? How flexible should we be? How encouraging and positive should we be? It's a high standard, isn't it? But it is so clearly revealed here. This is a part of God's purpose.

How prepared are we going to be for life in the eternal future when we ourselves are raised and glorified and we become not only body but bride? How important is it going to be to reflect those attitudes and that level of righteousness? Well, it is a righteousness without which no one will see the Lord. That's what we're told. And it is good practice.

We practice on each other now. And in this day when we still are tempted, we still have the

desires of the flesh, we still have false standards of self-glorification where we think we have a right and we have a platform, I'm telling you, find that trophy children thing and watch it. If anybody can watch that and not be convicted in some way, shape and form, I'd like to meet them and shake their hand.

It is an eye-opener and a great place to think about spiritual things as you watch secular things. We all need to be less and less of ourselves and more and more of Jesus Christ. And on that note, we'll close our study for this morning and we'll pick up in Ephesians chapter 3 next time.

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for Your immeasurable grace in sending the Lord Jesus Christ not only to fulfill the covenants that You made with Your people of the old covenant age, but extending Your grace and Your mercy to us and making it possible for all of us to become one in Christ. I pray that God the Holy Spirit will continue to shine the light of Your glory on these truths so that we cannot ignore them, so that we will remember them.

We will be changed by them and transformed by the renewing of our minds. We will see what Your perfect will is for us and we will fulfill it in the power that You have provided to us through Your Word and through Your Spirit. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.