

**Disciples are a Bi-Cultural Church**

Ephesians 2:11-22

The Church is “bi-cultural.” In other words, it’s made up of two cultures. Before the coming of Christ there was only one people in the Church – the direct, bloodline descendents of Abraham. There was no salvation or eternal life outside of the covenant God made with his people at Mount Sinai. If you were a descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you had a chance at eternal life. If you were born Chinese, European, African or American, you were out of luck. That may seem unfair, but who are we to say what is and is not fair? God makes the rules. We live by them.

In Jesus, however, God did a new thing. Jesus did something he promised in the Old Testament, but that didn’t happen until his death and resurrection. He made his Church “bi-cultural.” You didn’t have to be part of Israel by blood to be saved anymore. Now both Jew and non-Jew find redemption in the same place – in Jesus Christ and his cross. Let’s look at today’s reading from Ephesians and see how this is true.

**<sup>11</sup> Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)— <sup>12</sup> remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.**

Many people are bothered by the idea that only those who trust in Jesus Christ will be saved. That’s a new generous offer on God’s part. If you were born before Jesus, salvation was only available to those of the “circumcision” – the Jewish people. Before Jesus, in Paul’s words, we non-Jews were “separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship...foreigners to the...promise...without God in the world.”

This is grace language. If we are saved by God’s grace, it is because no one deserves to be saved. If we did deserve salvation, then we would not be saved by grace but by merit, as a reward. As it is, God’s gift of salvation is exactly that – a gift – and therefore God can give it to whomever he wishes.

**<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.**

Here’s another way of stating the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We can say: “Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world, that all might be saved through him.” We can say “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” And we can say, “In Christ Jesus we who once were far away (from God) have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

There is nothing we can do to bring ourselves near to God. God must bring us near. And the means by which he has chosen to bring us to himself is the blood of his Son shed at the cross. The Gospel is as simple as that.

**<sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.**

There can be no peace between the Kingdom of the Devil and the Kingdom of Christ. If we attempt to make peace, we destroy Christ's kingdom and help establish Satan's. It's like negotiating with terrorists. Most countries in the world claim they will never negotiate with terrorists. How come? Because if you do, you've immediately rewarded the terrorists for their evil acts, no matter what you may get in the process. In the same way, we can never negotiate with the Kingdom of Satan. He will always win, and we will always lose.

Since all Gentiles before Christ were, by nature, part of the Kingdom of Satan, there was obviously a wall of hostility between Israel – the Church – and the rest of the people of the earth. Now that both Jew and Gentile can be brought near to God through the blood of Jesus, the wall has “moved.” Now both Jews and Gentiles can be found on both sides of the wall. Those who trust in Christ are in his Kingdom on one side of the wall, in the Church, and those Jews and Gentiles who deny that Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins are on the other side. Christ has fulfilled the law's demands, sacrifices and rituals. Anyone seeking to come near to God through any means other than Christ finds themselves on the other side of the “wall of hostility.”

**<sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.**

If you read carefully, you can't help but see God's triune nature revealed all over the Bible. Here it is again – it is Christ's blood that gives us access to the Father by one Spirit. God saves us, because the Father has sent his Son to die and their Spirit now gives us new life. Father, Son and Holy Spirit – a God by any other name is no God at all.

**<sup>19</sup> Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,**

Now there is no longer “Jew and Gentile,” but “disciple of Christ and non-believer.” The so-called “state of Israel” is of no more significance to God than the United States, Canada, China, or Zimbabwe. There is no more Israel, outside of the Church, which is the New Israel of Jew and Gentile believers in Jesus. We who were once Gentiles are now the true heirs of Israel, and entitled to call ourselves Israelites as much as Jacob, Joseph, Ruth, David, and all the rest of the people in the Old Testament could. We are fellow citizens with them if we are in Christ, the Messiah.

**<sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

The stone Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD as Jesus said it would be. That was God's final pronouncement that the "old Israel" was gone, because the new Israel in Christ Jesus had come.

You are now the Temple. It is not a building made with sticks and stones that an army can overrun, but a temple made of flesh and blood brought to new life by the Holy Spirit. You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, built up together on Jesus, the cornerstone, taught by the prophets and the apostles.

### **Conclusion**

There is no more "unicultural" church. There are two cultures within – Jew and Gentile, natural descendent of Abraham and spiritual descendent of the promise. Outside the Church, there is truly only one culture. A culture of death. In this life there can be little peace between the two cultures. But we rejoice in the peace that has come to us in Jesus, the peace that brings us close to God, the peace that binds us together into one Temple.

Amen.