

***Building Biblical
COMMUNITY in CHRIST***

**I Have a Dream: Unity in the New Man
(Ephesians 2:11-18)**

In my opinion, one of the greatest speeches of the 20th century was delivered on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial August 28, 1963. Who can forget the impassioned words and eloquent delivery of Martin Luther King Jr.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal." I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood... I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

Today I too have a dream. Not just a hope for America in its racial struggles. But a vision of the way things ought to be within the Church. I have a dream of the day when Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasians will feel equally at home here. I have a dream when the aged and the X-Generation can be mutually respected. I have a dream when the downtrodden and the affluent can hold hands and pray because they have the same High Priest, Jesus who intercedes at God's Right Hand.

The Church is called by many names and described by many images in the New Testament. It is Christ's Body, the Temple of God, the Priesthood, the Bride, the People of God, the Flock. In today's text, the Church is described by yet another image, The New Man.

We could summarize our text of Ephesians 2:11-18 this way: **"We used to be separated (vs. 11-12), but now we are saved (vs. 13); now we are unified into the New Man where the dream is alive for peace (vs. 14-15), reconciliation (vs. 16-17), and equality (vs. 18)."**

Let's look again at what Paul wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. First, he addresses believers who are Gentiles by race and heritage. He talks to us, for I assume most all of us are Gentiles, as we sit here in our pews in Portland.

1. "We used to be separated" (Our former condition). (2:11-12)

These verses describe our miserable, hopeless, desperate, lost condition as Gentiles before we were "brought near (to God) through the blood of Christ."

¹¹Therefore, 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)—¹²remember 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.

2. "But now we are saved" (Our present salvation) (2:13)

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

We were once "far away." Yes, that's one way to put it. Ephesians 2:1 puts it even blunter, "We were dead" toward God. It is fashionable in some ecclesiastical circles to say piously, "There are many paths that lead to God." But this verse indicates the truth according to God. Any path that bringing you to God must lead "through the blood of Christ." Now it is, indeed, true that the path that leads us to the foot of the cross might be different. Some get there by a winding, long, painful journey. Bill Berg's neighbor Ed who is 96 years old, who lived across the street from John Mitchell for years, finally on Good Friday morning was "brought near through the blood of Christ." In contrast, on Easter evening, Susannah Fischer, age 5 was lead to saving faith by her parents. Ed's path to the cross was a long, winding, painful journey. Susannah's path to the cross was short, straight, and absent many scars from the follies of sin. But in both cases, they had to end up at the cross, they had to be "brought near through the blood of Christ."

Have you found yourself there yet? Whether your motivation is escaping the crushing load of guilt or embracing the welcoming arms of Christ, whether you are fleeing hell or running toward heaven, whether your motivation is to belong to the Church instead of being alone or whether your motivation is take a stand for truth even though you have to stand alone, we all come through the blood of Christ to obtain our grace-filled salvation.

3. "We are unified in the New Man" (Our hope-filled dream) (2:14-18)

When we come to verses 14-18 Paul expresses "I have a dream" for the Church. He calls it The New Man. And his dream is that it would have three characteristics:

a. Peace (vs. 14-15)

*¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself **one new man** out of the two, thus making peace,*

Paul sees all mankind in a relationship of solidarity with either the first man Adam, or the "second man" Christ. If we are in the first Adam, we are under the rule of sin (Rom. 5:12-14) and death (1 Cor. 15:22) and are alienated from God (Eph. 4:18) and our fellow man (Eph. 2:11-13). But being in the second Adam Christ reverses all these affects. We become part of the one new man. We experience life (1Cor. 15:22), righteousness (Rom 5:19), and relational unity (Eph. 2:14-15).

Unfortunately, the local church often fails to reflect its identity as an expression of the universal church composed of all believers. The local church is often fractured with disharmony. In 2000 pastor Eric Daniel Harris (age 37) pleaded guilty to the arson that burned down the Missionary Baptist Church in Saline County, Arkansas. According to the federal prosecutor, Harris said he did it because "there was a division among church members, and they needed a project to unify them."

Unfortunately, real unity doesn't come by the distraction of a common project. Real unity comes when we realize and act upon our identity.

b. Reconciliation (vs. 16-17)

¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away (the Gentiles) and peace to those who were near (The Jews).

Usually in Scripture, reconciliation is a theological term that describes the change of status between us sinners and the holy God. We who were enemies of God have "been reconciled to God by the death of his son."

But here the reconciliation is not between God and man, but between people within the church. Specifically, it is a reconciliation between racial groups that had a long history of antagonism, arrogance, and atrocities.

Everywhere you look in the world which is under the domain of Satan you will find racial strife. When I was a naive child, I thought that racial tension was only a problem between blacks and white in urban America or the Deep South. But I have learned what all of you know. Racial hatred seems to be as common as sin within the human heart. Whether in South Africa, Bosnia, Pakistan, or Congo, racial tensions flame into violent reactions.

I may be pessimistic about the eradication of racial tensions within the world. But I have a hope-filled dream for the reconciliation of separate groups within the Church. The Church has as its head, founder, leader, and lover the Lord who brings us all together. When we put our attention upon Him and his infinite and non-discriminatory love, we can follow his example. The Latino, Asian, Black, and Caucasion find common ground at the cross. The aged and the Gen-X can

come together in love. The upscale and the downtrodden, the homeowner and the homeless, all these are welcome at Christ's table. And if our Lord has embraced you, so should I.

Unity doesn't happen just because we put different groups together. Unity is not necessarily union. Unity is not two cats with their tails tied together, hung over a clothes line. That is union, but it is not unity.

No, unity comes about through mutual respect, understanding, and selfless love.

c. Equality (vs. 18)

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

There is equality within the Body of Christ, within The New Man. Both Gentiles and Jews have equal access to salvation and access to prayer.

The bell of equality is struck in such passages as Galatians 3:26-28, *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Challenges for Us

1. Focus on Christ's sufficiency instead of your own superiority or inferiority in relation to others.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek (no reason for feeling inferior or superior because of your racial or cultural background), slave nor free (no reason for feeling inferior or superior because of your economic standing), male nor female (no reason for feeling inferior or superior because of your gender), for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The trouble within the church is that even within The New Man we have half the people thinking and acting like they are superior (because of their race, money, or gender, age, spiritual gifts or anything else we might name) and half the people thinking and acting like they are inferior. Although these might seem like entirely opposite spiritual maladies, they are two different symptoms of the same disease. The disease? Being self-conscious instead of Christ-conscious. Putting our eyes on ourselves instead of taking direction from the Head of the Church who loves each member, longing to present to himself the Church in all her radiant beauty without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

2. Remember you are part of something bigger than yourself. As John Donne put it, "No man is an island." That is true in the Church. You may think you are an independent individual sowing and reaping your personal rewards and

judgments. But you are more than an individual Christian wandering on your own pilgrimage to the Celestial City. But you are also part of The New Man, the Church, the Temple of God. If we fail to mature, if we fail to serve, if we fail to walk in purity, our failure will impact the whole of which we are a part. Your sin weakens the character and the reputation of the entire Body of Christ.

On the other hand, if we grow in Christlikeness, if we put ourselves to the task of ministry, if we flee evil and do righteousness, our faithfulness contributes to the health of the whole body.

This week I heard the honking of Canadian geese flying north as they maneuvered their flight pattern over Happy Valley. Have you ever read the research on why they fly as they do? Those who have made this their study have discovered (1) the geese in the rear of the V formation are the ones who do the honking. (I suppose it is their version of back seat driving or cheering section for their leaders.) (2) Those in front rotate their leadership. When the lead goose gets tired, it changes places with one farther back in the wing and another flies point. (3) By flying as they do, the members of the flock create an upward air current for one another. Each flap of the wings literally creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. One author calculates by flying in V-formation, the whole flock gets 71% greater flying energy than if each goose flew alone.

So, remember you are part of something bigger than yourself. If you fly solo, you will exhaust yourself and your contribution will be absent.

3. Affirm our unity by caring for our church family. The huge redwood trees of California amaze mankind. They are the largest living things on earth and the tallest trees in the world. Some of them are 300' high and over 2,500 years old. One would think that trees so large must have a tremendous root system that reaches down hundreds of feet to support their height. But not so. The redwoods have very shallow root systems. The redwood root system gets its stability because they intertwine. They are locked to each other. When the storms come and the winds blow the redwood still stand. They are locked to each other. Each tree is important to all the other trees in the grove.

Testimony of Cheree Jones.

I have a dream. It is summed up in these words:

In Christ there is no East or West, in Him no South or North; but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.

Join hands then, brothers of the faith, whate'er your race may be; who serves my Father as a son is surely kin to me.