

Ephesians Series

6. One in Christ? [Sermon Notes]

We used to live in Stamford Hill which has some of the largest concentration of ultraorthodox Jews in the country. They kept the Sabbath religiously. To keep their quality of life they employ Goys (Gentiles) to do their jobs for them.

I've always found this amazing. In order to do their religious duty, they employ Gentiles. What about the Gentiles? They are outside of Jewish salvation, lost, irrelevant, unworthy, inferior.

Is that what Judaism is about? Many other Jews would say No. But this serves to illustrate well the attitude the Jews had to Gentiles in the first century. There was a wall of partition - a barrier between them. The Gentiles were outside of the promises of God through Israel. That was the situation as far as most Jews were concerned. However, they were supposed to be a light to the Gentiles, but they had fallen into disobedience.

Human race - we put up barriers against one another, racism, ageism, nationalism - we are conscious of the fact that we differ. Desire to be distinctive, different. And we use that difference to divide ourselves from others.

That division crept over into the church in the first century. The Jews thought themselves superior because they had this background. And in fact, if the Gentile were to receive any recognition they had to become Jews first. Paul, the former arch-Pharisee put a stop to it.

Hasn't changed - some people think themselves superior to others. Use of denominations or doctrine to keep us apart from the Lord's people.

BUT - we are one in Christ. Part of the same family.

2:18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,

Through Christ both the Jews and the Gentiles get a status that is quite unique - both can now be children of God - that is something the Jews could never claim.

It is simply a case of a level playing field. Christ has broken down the barriers, abolished the law and made two into one. It is a new game, new rules and we start by becoming the children of God.

Think and look carefully before to write off someone from another church or another perspective. Wesley and Whitefield were at different ends of the theological scale but were good friends.

Now we are

- » brought near
- » have peace with God
- » law is abolished
- » now only one body containing both

And we already experience that in our own Church; we are from lots of different backgrounds. But we are all one in Christ.

Importance of working together in unity ourselves.

But there is also importance of working together in unity with other Christians.

Oh no, he's not going to talk about the ecumenical movement I hear you saying!

Yes and no. Should we not work with anyone that bears the name of Christ?

This passage helps us.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the

dividing wall of hostility, 15 by 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, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

What makes people of God together? The blood of Christ. It is through the cross we are all made one man, one body, in Christ. So if someone is trusting Christ, then they are your brother or sister in Christ - whichever church they attend. Remember that first of all.

But this is also a way in which we can determine with whom we have fellowship. Jews called themselves the people of God - they still boast it? So are they? There were certainly recipients of earthly promises but they are not Christians. If they are without Christ they are without hope, not part of God's family. The only criterion we can recognise the people of God by is the cross.

Ecumenical movement - is that unity is a principle because we call churches Christian rather than look at our relationship with Christ? When you go down the road of trying to reconcile structures and practices, then that doesn't bring people to Christ. I may be cool to the ecumenical movement, but I am strongly for joining with any other Christian who wants to extend the kingdom of God in Christ.

And this is what is truly important. The role of the church is to extend the kingdom. Anything else is an unwarranted distraction. When Christians get together to extend the kingdom, it is immensely powerful - Billy Graham in 1950s onwards. Same was true in previous generations - D L Moody.

If we can't or won't do that, then we are wasting our time. We need to recognise that in Swaffham too. We need to recognise that in our Church our diversity builds us up because we are one in Christ.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

This emphasises the importance of unity

- we are a holy temple
- we are a dwelling place

Temple - God resided there. Temple was eventually destroyed - a potent sign that God was now residing in a different way. Personally the Holy Spirit resides in us. However, we are a building in which the Holy Spirit resides. How much does that show? By that I don't mean the physical building but that we live in, but the state of that tells quite a lot about us. But about our relationships together.