



EPHESIANS - WEEK 6

The Blessing of Church

Opening prayer

Prayer for the persecuted church:

Prembati has been a Christian for one year. However, her son has been a Christian for a long time and is helping Prembati grow in her faith. Prembati's family members are outcasts in their village because of their belief in Jesus. Lately, the others in the village have threatened Prembati—telling her that the consequences will be dire if they don't leave Christianity. Let's make her prayer our prayer for her. "Dear God, thank you. We come to your feet this moment—hear our prayers. Prembati needs a job to sustain her family, please provide a good job for her. Please help her family to grow stronger and more faithful

in you. We pray for all your servants who are toiling for your ministry in India—please give them your grace and bless them. Please take care of Prembati in the coming days and please hear her prayers. We pray for health and for grace that she might be able to be faithful. Please help her read the Bible daily and also obey it. Give her wisdom so that she might be able to be faithful till her last breath. Thanks for all your blessings. In Jesus' name, amen.

Prayer for a local church:

This morning we pray for our brother Daniel Garcia and Emmaus Church San Bernadino.

Closing prayer

INTRODUCTION

- Magazine quote

Big Idea: The only thing that truly brings down dividing walls between people is the gospel. And the place this reality is demonstrated most fully is the church.

And that's where we're headed today — to see how this reality is demonstrated through the church, specifically the body of the local church. We're going to spend most of our time building toward these four points of application about the blessing of church.

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God

prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Do you wonder what your purpose in life is? God has prepared good works for you to walk in, to perform. You live to do these good works. If you're a Christian and you're saying to yourself, "I feel purposeless," I have to wonder if you're walking in good works.

What good works? Well, just off the top of my

head I can name a few. How about caring for the poor? How about caring for orphans? How about taking the gospel to all creation? How about showing radical hospitality?

One of the good works God calls us to walk in is loving our neighbors. If you look at the history of the world, this has always been a problem. The history of war is not only territorial, but it's also ethnic and religious. In other words, people go to war over the otherness of others, the Hutu

slaughter of the Tutsi minority in the Rwandan genocide and the stories go on and on throughout recorded history. People not only divide, but they go to war over their differences.

So, in the preceding verses Paul reminded us of our past and now he's taking us into our future. But he's telling us not to forget where we came from, what our former selves were like.

Ephesians 2:11-22

¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision”

He’s telling us to remember where we came from — Gentiles who were spiritually dead, spiritually blind, spiritually deaf, spiritually deceived and enslaved by our sinful natures. Gentiles who were once called “the uncircumcision” by those who were circumcised, the people of Israel.

by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—

Paul is being somewhat sarcastic here, emphasizing that circumcision is only a physical representation of a much greater truth. So, don't get hung up on circumcision, because it's not the point. No pun intended.

That's why he writes “**which is made in flesh by hand.**” He's pointing out that the Jews sometimes emphasized the wrong things in Scripture, the physical, rather than the spiritual, or the heart. The circumcision they're referring to is merely physical, where Paul says the

circumcision that matters is the circumcision of the heart. But he reminds the Gentiles:

¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ,

This is kind of the negative way of counting your blessings. Remember who you were, so you can be thankful for where you are. MLJ says that's the worst thing anyone can ever say about you — that you're separated from Christ. There's an alienation. It's felt.

**alienated from the commonwealth of Israel
and strangers to the covenants of promise,
having no hope and without God in the world.**

This is what alienation feels like. There's a hopelessness to alienation. You feel like stranger. You feel distant from others. You even feel alienated from yourself. People still express these types of feelings when they say things like, "I'm trying to find myself," etc.

For a brief period of my college experience, I was part of a fraternity. This meant I shared in the commonwealth of the fraternity. I was allowed to go to the members only parties. I was taught the secret handshake. I voted on officers. I could use the recreation room to watch TV or play foosball or study. People outside of our fraternity weren't allowed access to these same things. They were only common to members of the fraternity.

That's kind of what Paul's talking about here. The

Gentiles weren't part of the Jewish community so they didn't have access to the Scriptures. They didn't know the promises God made through the prophets of the coming Messiah.

Now, because they were without all these things their lives were less than upstanding in comparison to the Jews, so the Jewish community judged the immoral behavior of the Gentiles very harshly. So much so that Gentiles were sometimes referred to as dogs (and not

because they were faithful).

There was ethnic and religious tension between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were the chosen people of God. The Gentiles were superstitious pagans. Now, both of those statements are true in one sense, but when members of the Jewish community grew “puffed up with the privilege” God gave them, they would treat Gentiles in a manner that was actually contrary to God’s law.

So, there is a Jewish/Gentile conflict here, an alienation. And when you feel hated by someone, what do you do? You hate them back. There was a “love your neighbor” issue.

So, Paul reminds the Gentiles... they **had no hope and without God in the world.**

Not only were they missing all these advantages that the Jews had, but they were sinful by nature and didn't even have the desire to seek salvation.

“There is none righteous, no not one. There is no one who seeks after God.” (Romans 3:10-12)

Paul highlights the devastation of our sin so that we can rejoice in the glorious nature of the grace we've been shown.

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off (you Gentiles) have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Now, we're into counting positive blessings. Once God seemed distant, remote, and far away, but now because of what Christ has done for us, God is our Father. We are brought near. We are now his children and that closeness now defines our relationship with God.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace,

Christ himself is our peace with God. He took our sins upon himself, paid the penalty for our sins and then God gave us the righteousness of Christ — the Great Exchange. Now we have

peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We're no longer alienated from God because of our sins.

But we also have peace with others. In this case, Paul is speaking specifically of the Jew and Gentile divide, but this can be applied even more broadly. Wherever you find one group defining itself over and against another group, this can be applied. Humanity continually puts up dividing walls of hostility, because sin not only alienates us from God, it alienates us from one another.

That's why we contend that only in the gospel do these dividing walls actually come down, because these walls of hostility are built by the human heart. They are not social-political. They are spiritual.

- Boice quote page 85 (political negotiations)

Paul goes on to say that the gospel, that Jesus Christ Himself has...

who has made us both (Jews and Gentiles) one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances,

So, what is this dividing wall of hostility? Well, in choosing the people of Israel as his people, God set them apart from every other group of people on the earth. Moses writes in Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 32:8-9

⁸ When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,

**when he divided mankind,
he fixed the borders of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of
God.**

**⁹ But the Lord's portion is his people,
Jacob his allotted heritage.**

God revealed himself to Israel as the one true God and then he added dietary laws and ceremonial laws with the sacrifices of blood all of which separated the Jews from everyone around them foreshadowing the work of Christ.

This is where many in the nation of Israel misunderstood their blessings in having the covenants of promise, the law and the sacrifices. And where they misapplied or misunderstood these things is thinking these things had value in and of themselves.

Take the law for instance. Why was the law given? That Israel might become this morally superior people? Well, many thought so, which is

why they looked down upon the Gentiles. But Paul tells us the law was given that we might recognize our sinfulness first and foremost.

Israel was supposed to be this shining light to the nations, to show the pagans the way to the one true God. But they continually failed to do this. It has been said that the Old Testament can be seen as God's object lesson to humanity, showing us that we can't save ourselves by the law. "There is none righteous, there is none who

seek God.” Because in the Old Testament we find this running commentary on how humanity continually failed to love God by obeying his laws.

Now the blood sacrifices of the animals taught generations about substitutionary atonement. The blood represented the life of a human being and since the wages of sin is death, that life is required of the human being. But instead of putting the human being to death for his sins, an

animal's blood was substituted. All those sacrifices mean nothing without the finished work of Jesus Christ. Those animal sacrifices were just foreshadowing the death of Jesus on the cross, the once and for all final sacrifice.

But all the laws that were in place, these laws about diets and clean and unclean animals and sacrifices, made Israel different than the nations around them. And when Israel didn't see these laws and sacrifices for what they actually were,

pointers to greater truths, they misapplied them and that's when pride set in. Because even though you cannot keep the law perfectly, if you kept it better than the pagans you would feel superior to them. That's a misapplication of the law of God.

The thing that illustrates this alienation of sin between people and God so beautifully is the temple.

- The Temple Illustration

But now, Paul says, both Jews and Gentiles approach God through Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of all the sacrifices and all the laws.

that he (Christ) might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,

There is no longer the Jewish way versus the

Gentile way, but there is only Christ the way. The one new man Christ created is called the Church, which consists of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles, both male and female, both slave and free.

And because people from both groups believe in Christ, there is now peace between them. Jews who believe in Christ and Gentiles who believe in Christ find a bond of unity in their common salvation. They will actually now have more in

common with another believer who comes from a totally different background than they will with those who are of the same background but don't believe in Christ.

And that's across the board when it comes to the gospel and the church.

You naturally have more in common with people who are more like you. Therefore, you tend to favor people who are like you. And this is true of

all people of all races. You'll find people of a certain race favoring people of their race. What most often happens is that a pride sets in and one group sees itself as superior to another group, because that group doesn't do the things the way we do, which is the right way. "You shouldn't take a nap in the afternoon in the middle of a work day! What are you? Lazy?"

But the gospel brings an element that is stronger than any race or culture, the living God.

¹⁶ and might reconcile us both (Jews and Gentiles) to God in one body (the Church) through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off (the Gentiles) and peace to those who were near (the Jews). ¹⁸ For through him (Christ) we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you (Gentiles) are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (the Church),

The Spirit of the living God inside of a human being becomes the unifying factor in a person's life. And this is what brings instant unity to a group of Christians, regardless of their cultural or racial differences or backgrounds. Because their unity is...

²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

Does he mean the foundation is the actual people, the apostles and the prophets? What did the apostles and prophets do? They taught about Jesus Christ. Christ is the cornerstone. He's the One the church is built on, the rock that the gates of hell cannot prevail against.

²¹ in whom the whole structure (the whole Church), being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

The church now is the temple of the Lord, made

up of people from every tongue and tribe and nation. The physical temple has always pointed to a greater reality — the church.

²² In him you (Gentiles) also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The church is the dwelling place of God. What does it mean that the church is the dwelling place of God? What does that mean for all

Christians around the world? Christians who are Chinese, Christians who are Mexican, Christians who are Russian, Christians who are French (they're a few), Christians who are Indian, Christians who are black or white or yellow or brown?

This is where we see this reality that the gospel breaks down walls of hostility demonstrated most fully in the church.

1 Point #1 - There is Purpose in Community.

First, it shows there is intentionality in God bringing a group of people together in whom his Spirit dwells. There is purpose in community, showing us that the thing that unites us all is what is most important in the lives of all true Christians — Christ in you, the hope of glory. This brings a diversity to the body of Christ when we understand the nature of the gospel. When we understand what actually unifies the church,

which is the same Holy Spirit dwelling in us. That's why preaching doctrine doesn't divide the church, but actually unites the church. You can't be united if you don't understand the doctrine of regeneration, Christ in you, and the implications of that doctrine.

Even when everything is foreign to you in another person's life, the thing you can find the deepest common ground on is the love each of you has for the biblical Jesus. That bridges every human

gap.

- The doctrine of Christ is the foundation of Christian unity.

2 | Point #2 - We can only function in conjunction within a local body.

I know that sounds like a Schoolhouse Rock song, but there you have it. How does a hand perform its purpose if it doesn't have a body? The gifts we've been given only function in the

midst of a group. If you look at the gifts of the Spirit, they are all made for others. So, how do you grow in usefulness to God if you're not exercising your gift in conjunction with a local church somewhere?

3 Point #3 - God is experienced most fully in the midst of his body, the church.

If the church is God's dwelling then God's presence will be experienced in a fuller sense in

the midst of the church, his body. And you'll find that true both scripturally and experientially. Where two or more are gathered he is in their midst. Two or more.

4 Point #4 - God does his work through local churches.

God does his work through groups of people. This doesn't mean God doesn't use individual Christians, but when God uses you to impact someone's life, the entire church benefits.

Somewhere a local church benefits from each individual whose life is impacted by another person's life. Besides, those people who stand out in the body of Christ only stand out because they are functioning within the body of Christ with their gift. You would never have celebrity preachers if there wasn't a local body who listened to them.

Unique Salvation History — The details of the temple walls and the people and the curtain

inside the holy of holies show us the active will of God in our salvation. It's wonderful historical evidence that God is communicating to humanity. He acted in history and then he told us what his actions mean. The temple was destroyed in history as part of God's plan. Christ is the true high priest. Christ is the true temple. Christ fulfills all in all.

If you're not a Christian yet, that should call you to repentance. Throughout Jewish history, God

has used the means of a lamb in place of the guilty sinner. Christ is the ultimate lamb of God who takes away your sins. Salvation is placing your trust in what God has done for you in Christ. He took your sins upon his body. He paid the price, the penalty that you deserve he took. He rose from the dead. You can know him now. Call out to him and he will answer you. The history of the temple shows you that what he did in his life, death and resurrection is sufficient.

As a matter of fact, if you begin to read the Old Testament with Jesus Christ in mind, you'll begin to see how everything he did was foretold hundreds of years before he was born. No other religion has the evidence of fulfilled prophecy as Christianity does.