

THE BARRIER OF ENMITY REMOVED

Ephesians Part IX

Please turn in your bibles to Ephesians 2:11.

Over the past few services we have been talking about the powers, how Paul defined them and their origins. Paul speaks not only of malevolent spiritual powers, but also about malevolent earthly powers. Paul tells us that they are linked, with the earthly powers doing the bidding of the spiritual powers. At the end of the day, the result is the same – enslavement and oppression. Remember that Ephesians is a message primarily to Gentile believers and Paul's message is that of unity with the Jewish believers, as God now wants not two different people (Jews and Gentiles) but one “new man/ humanity” which was the plan from the beginning. Remember the Dominion Mandate in Genesis? But there is a back story to all this that we need to familiarize ourselves with if we want to understand why this is such a big deal to Paul and his theology.

At the beginning, God gave the Dominion Mandate to Adam and Eve. They were to rule and reign over creation here on earth. Of course, that was derailed in the garden, which was the goal of the serpent. As you work your way through the first 11 chapters of Genesis, you can see that things are going downhill. Seth wasn't the answer, Noah wasn't the answer, mankind just couldn't get it together. Restoring earth to the Edenic ideal wasn't happening. When we reach Genesis 12, we see a new character enter the stage. This was Abram, eventually known as Abraham. What happens with him? God moves him away from his family into a new land – Canaan. God wants to work through this guy, so He promises him that He will make of him a nation and give him all the land he can see from where he stands. We go through the rest of Genesis watching Abraham's family navigate the typical drama that enters the lives of us all. This extended family is wealthy, but due to a famine, they move to Egypt to weather the storm. Of course, God knew all this and made sure to prepare the way for them by making sure that Joseph, a descendant of Abraham was the vizier of Egypt. Joseph invited his family to move down to Egypt, giving them the choicest land where they could grow their flocks. Things were good for a while. But then, as they so often do, things changed when eventually a new pharaoh, who didn't know Joseph enslaved the Israelites for fear of them over-taking the kingdom. That eventually led to the exodus.

While trekking through the desert, we see this bunch of somewhat domesticated folk struggle to follow the God who brought them out of their slavery. Eventually they come to a mountain, (Mt. Sinai) where they are presented with and agree to a covenant, (suzerain/ vassal treaty with God. It is in agreeing to enter into a covenant with God that the people now known as Israel get their identity. They are the people of YHWH, as compared to all the nations around them who worship other gods. The covenant, the legal contract that we refer to as ‘the Law’ gives Israel rules by which they are to live. Some of these laws are almost identical to the laws of their

neighbors, but there are others which are very different. These differences distinguish Israel even more from their neighbors. One of these was the Sabbath, which was not heard of anywhere else. By taking a day off, when everyone else worked and carried on business all week, gained them the reputation of being lazy. They also didn't engage in magic or witchcraft. They only worshipped one God. All of these things and many others singled them out among the other nations of the world. Why were they to be different? They were to be different because their God, the one true God, the only one capable of creation, was different. As they imaged their God, reflecting His character to those around them, they stood out like a sore thumb – as long as they were different. They were to be a kingdom of priests, liaisons between the one true God and all the other people. By the time they reached Jericho – the first city they would take upon entering the Promised Land, the word had already reached Canaan. The God of Israel had defeated the mighty Egyptian army. People were afraid of them and their God. But things quickly went wrong by the time they attempted to take their next target, Ai. And so, Israel struggled throughout their history. Once again, they were to be a nation of priests who showed the rest of the world what the one true God was like. But we know how that went. Instead of being different, they blended in with their pagan neighbors and turned away from God - on the whole.

The combination of being the “chosen people,” their different culture and their hypocrisy became a barrier between Israel and those around them. Instead of being different in a good way, so that everyone would want to be on their team, serving their God, they came to be the weird family who moved into the neighborhood that everyone wished would move away. And that is why Paul speaks of this barrier.

Eph. 2:11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called “the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹² remember^l that you were at that time separated from Christ, “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to “the covenants of promise, “having no hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were “far off have been brought near “by the blood of Christ.¹⁴ For “he himself is our peace, “who has made us both one and has broken down “in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in “ordinances, that he might create in himself one “new man in place of the two, so making peace,¹⁶ and might “reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.¹⁷ And he came and “preached peace to you who were “far off and peace to those who were “near.¹⁸ For “through him we both have “access in “one Spirit to the Father.¹⁹ So then you are no longer “strangers and aliens,⁴ but you are “fellow citizens with the saints and “members of the household of God,²⁰ “built on the foundation of the “apostles and prophets, “Christ Jesus himself being “the cornerstone,²¹ “in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into “a holy temple in the Lord.²² In him “you also are being built together “into a dwelling place for God by “the Spirit.

In verses 11,12, we see the language Paul uses to make his point about the enmity and separation.

- Circumcision vs. uncircumcision. A distinction made by the Jews towards the Gentiles. And the animosity ran both ways.
- More language: separated from Christ; alienated from Israel, (the chosen); strangers to the covenants of promise; Having no hope without God in this world.
- That's a very bleak way to look at anyone. But this shows in a concise way the enmity and barrier between these two people groups – Jews and Gentiles.

Now, look at the next section.

. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were ^pfar off have been brought near ^aby the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For ^rhe himself is our peace, ^swho has made us both one and has broken down ^tin his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...

- “once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ “covenant/ temple sacrifice language. (Explain)
- Jesus is who all these hinges upon.
- Having broken down in His flesh – That will be important later.
- “Having broken down the dividing wall of hostility. What wall?

SLIDE OF TEMPLE COURT

SLIDE OF ENGRAVING

What Paul is speaking of, this dividing wall, was an image the Gentiles around Jerusalem knew well. This is something of the physical manifestation of the divide that was healed by Jesus. But what created the wall?

¹⁴ For ^rhe himself is our peace, ^swho has made us both one and has broken down ^tin his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ^uordinances, that he might create in himself one ^vnew man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might ^wreconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

Jesus broke down the wall by abolishing the commandments expressed in ordinances. Paul is saying that the commandments of the Torah was what separated the Jews from the Gentiles. Now, that may sound a no-brainer, but what Paul is saying is that the Torah created a type of separation that was never intended. The Torah was used to create a we/ they, us/ them thing, whereby Israel felt superior to the Gentiles even though they were no better than the Gentiles, (speaking of the hypocrisy of Israel.)

Now, Paul doesn't mean that Torah was bad, not at all.

Rom. 7:4 Likewise, my brothers, ^gyou also have died ^hto the law ⁱthrough the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, ^jin order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵ For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work ^kin our members ^lto bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the ^mnew way of ⁿthe Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.³

Rom. 7:7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, ^oI would not have known sin.

Torah is God's word. There is nothing wrong with it. But it had become a barrier in a way that was not intended. Being an Israelite had become an ethnic, inherited thing and loyalty to God had been cast aside. Paul states in that same passage of Romans that Torah showed/ defined sin. That is a good thing. But it also made humanity aware, brought sin to the attention of people in a way that draws us to it. Torah is good at what it was designed to do but had no power to help anyone adhere to it. This shows that, as we saw last time, how something created good can become something used in a bad way.

Paul never claims that Torah is bad/ legalistic, and grace is something that allows us to run amok with no reciprocity. He would turn over in his grave to hear that sort of thing. What he is saying here in Ephesians, among other things is that Torah had been used and abused in such a way to make even the proselytized Gentiles into something akin to second-class citizens.

hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in "ordinances, that he might create in himself one ^vnew man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might ^wreconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and ^xpreached peace to you who were ^yfar off and peace to those who were ^znear. ¹⁸ For ^athrough him we both have ^baccess in ^cone Spirit to the Father ¹⁹ So then you are no longer ^dstrangers and aliens,⁴ but you are ^efellow citizens with the saints and ^fmembers of the household of God, ²⁰ ^gbuilt on the foundation of the ^hapostles and prophets, ⁱChrist Jesus himself being ^jthe cornerstone, ²¹ ^kin whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into ^la holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him ^myou also are being built together ⁿinto a dwelling place for God by⁵ the Spirit.

Jesus, through His body on the cross got rid of the barrier, Torah, so that everyone could be reconciled. Everyone who was "far off, uncircumcised, a stranger to the covenant, etc. could not be brought into the family, making what was once two different groups – Jew and Gentiles, into one big family. And that brings everything back full circle to what was supposed to happen in Genesis.

(May have to deal with the new temple part next time due to time constraints.)

But look at what Jesus and how He did it. Jesus went to the cross, giving Himself up in order to get rid of the enmity. He didn't strike or lash out at the those who wanted to kill him. He laid

down His life in order to do so. Jesus didn't kill his enemies He killed the enmity. Talk about God doing things "backwards/ upside down!"

The point of Torah's narrative is to expose humanity's inability to be God's faithful covenant partners, (including those whom God first chose).

In order for God to create the true family of Abraham, He needed to destroy the hostility between Israel and the Gentiles, (nations).

Are we able to see all that Jesus did for us? Do we appreciate it? If we truly see it, understand it and appreciate it, then we will have to do what He did in order to image Him. What do I mean by that?

We will have to learn not to kill (literally or verbally) our enemies. We will have to learn to go along with things at times even when we are in the right and are being wronged. We will have to learn to kill the enmity and hostility in order to win our enemies and bring them into God's family.

Matthew 26:52-54

⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For ^hall who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ ⁱDo you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me ^jmore than twelve ^klegions of angels? ⁵⁴ ^lBut how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"

If we are to image Him, we have to be as upside and backwards to the world's ways as He.

Let's pray.