

Reconciled In Christ

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Lom.! From the Apostle Paul to the church in a city called Ephesus, which is in the Mediterranean basin, roughly somewhere where modern-day Turkey is now.

Now, why am I finding this so hard to smooth out? Now, it's often been said that the book of Ephesians, the letter of the Ephesians, is about who we are in Christ.

And that's why we've chosen this little picture thing here, in Christ, and some of the things it says about who we are. And it's about how we've been reconciled to God in Christ.

And that we've been taken from the miry depths, to use the words of the psalmist, to the highest heights in him. We've been reconciled to him. We came from the very bottom to the very top.

But if that's all you thought Ephesians was about, you'd be missing a very, very important aspect of it. Because it's not just about us being reconciled to God in Christ.

[1 : 33] It's actually about us being reconciled to each other in Christ. And so, a picture that I want you to picture is a very easy picture for you to picture.

And just to keep in your mind is simply a picture of the cross. The picture of the cross, of course, it starts in the ground and the soil, representing the miry depths.

And it goes up to a great height, representing the heights which God has taken us. But of course, it is a wide crossbar as well. Imagine the arms of Jesus stretched wide. And that is what I want to speak to us about today.

About not just the heights and the depths of the love of God, but the length and the width of the love of God. So, I'm going to read the scripture just shortly. The words come up behind me now. It is quite a long section.

So, if you do have a Bible, it's really, really helpful to read along. Because, as I say, it's a little bit longer. When we read along, the words will come up here on the TV behind me.

[2 : 30] I'll just move this aside slightly so everyone can see. Okay, so reading from Ephesians chapter 2, verse 11. We're going to read right through to the end of chapter 3. Okay, so a bit longer. Think everyone happy with that? Okay, good.

Here we go. So, verse 11. Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, which is done the body by human hands.

Remember, 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.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace. Who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

By setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace. And in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.

[3 : 34] By which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who are far away and peace to those who are near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one spirit.

Consequently you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household. Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit. For this

reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles, surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you.

That is the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I've already written briefly. In reading this then you'll be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. Which was not made known to people in other generations as it's been revealed by the spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace, given me through the working of his power.

[4 : 47] Though I am less than the least of the Lord's people, this grace was given me to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

His intent was that now through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you therefore not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that's worked in us, to him be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

[6 : 07] Amen. Amen. There's loads in there. Loads in there. But what I want to talk about today, is I want to talk about how we are made one in Christ.

Now the big story of the Bible, if I were to sum it up, would be something like this. It's the story of God's desire for a people to call his own.

It's God's desire and his plan and his purpose in going out and winning those people, to himself.

And right from the beginning, right to the end, the Bible speaks of that story.

And there was always two real problems with God's desire to have a people for himself. And the first one was this, that we, the people who he loved and cared about, were enemies with him.

That was the first problem. The second problem was this, that we, the people who he loved and cared about, were enemies of each other. Now you probably know the story of how we, mankind, first became enemies of God, right at the beginning of the Bible.

[7 : 18] Adam and Eve are the parents of the human race. They took the forbidden fruit and they were cast out of the presence of God.

But you know, the same story actually tells the origin of all human enmity. If you look carefully, if you remember the story, you probably know that Adam and Eve were naked in the garden.

The first thing that they do when they take the forbidden fruit is that they realise they're naked and they make coverings for themselves. They hide, first of all, from each other.

They put a distance, a gap between each other. And what was true for those two humans became true for the human race as it went through the generations.

What was true for a person became true for a people. We put gaps and enmity between each other. What's good for me might not be good for you.

[8 : 21] So I'm just going to take what's good for me and I don't care what's good for you. Human society has developed much like a football match.

A football match can only have one winner and the winning team doesn't really care about the losing team and a draw is no good for anybody. So human society has been, the history of the nations, has been one of war and conflict, taking things from other people so they could have it for themselves.

Now, you might ask yourself, well, what's the dividing line? When do we decide who is us? Who is me? Who is part of my group, if you like? And who is other?

Who is something else? Well, there's all sorts of dividing lines, isn't there? The first one, the most obvious one, I suppose in some ways, would be the dividing line of nations. Nations go to war against each other.

Certainly, in the last few hundred years, nations have gone to war to take from other nations. I suppose, being in Scotland, the obvious thing is to talk about two countries which are, having for the last 300 or so years, part of a union of nations, England and Scotland.

[9 : 38] They're still called the old enemies, aren't they? Now, if you were to think that, and I think probably most people probably do that with a little bit of jest, think that England are the enemies of Scotland, it is nevertheless hardly the case that Scotland is one unified whole of people living in harmony with one another, is it?

I mean, let's be honest, we've got Edinburgh and Glasgow, two rival cities. Even within, say, if I was just to pick one randomly, Glasgow, you've got, probably the most thing that most people, certainly from abroad, would probably think of Glasgow, is the rivalry of the two great football clubs, Rangers and Celtic.

They just played today, Rangers and Celtic. Now, it's often said that the atmosphere, an old firm, a Rangers-Celtic football match, is the best of any derby in the world.

Now, I don't know if that's true or not, but the reason why the atmosphere is so good is, let's be honest, because the two sides, the fans, absolutely hate each other.

And that's just the truth. But even then, it even goes deeper than that. Where are the dividing lines drawn? In our society, there's a black American comedian, whose name escapes me just at the moment, and somebody asked him once about racism in the UK.

[11 : 05] And he said, you know, you do have racism in the UK, it's just a little bit different to America. You have the class system. That's where you get to be racist to people who look like you.

In the UK, we have middle class and working class. And the divide, although it's probably harder to define, is deep. There's probably been plenty of times when I've done a sort of a middle class sort of thing, and people have rolled their eyes at me and called me a middle class Wally.

And equally, working class people, there's probably been times when you've experienced people rolling their eyes, tutting at you because of the way you speak, the way you dress, the way you present.

That's just one of the things that happens in our society. There is divisions all over the place. Well, Paul here talks about a divide that is deeper than any of those.

He talks about a divide between Jews on one side and Gentiles on the other. So the Jews are the people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, the Gentiles, basically everybody else.

[12 : 19] Probably most people here, and maybe there's one or two people here that are descended from Jewish people, I don't know, or of the Jewish race, but the vast majority of us, I suspect, would be in the Gentile camp.

Let's have a look at verses 11 to 12. Therefore, remember that formerly, you who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, that is Jewish people, 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. You see, the gap was so big because Israel rightly saw themselves set apart by God at the very birth of the nation with the covenant made with Abraham all those years ago.

They saw themselves as different. They were separated from the rest of the world by circumcision and the law. This is what Paul, who was himself a circumcised Jew, this is what he said about the people of Israel in Romans 9.

He says, theirs is the adoption to sonship. Theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs and theirs is the ancestry of the Messiah, Jesus, who is to be praised over all.

[13 : 50] The Jews rightly saw themselves as set apart but while God's intention for the people of Israel, for the Jews was to set them apart to be a blessing to the nations, to show them through their worship of him, through their keeping of the Sabbath, through the keeping of the law, to show them what God was like to the world, to be a kingdom of priests.

Instead, their being set apart made them believe that they were somehow in themselves special and that in fact God hated the Gentiles.

Let me remind you of something that happens in Luke chapter 4. Jesus starts his ministry. He's in his hometown, Nazareth, and he starts off his ministry.

He preaches from the message of Isaiah. He says, the spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor and the people are lapping it up.

He's in the synagogue. They're loving it. But then, Jesus continues his message by saying, but you know, maybe God doesn't really hate the Gentiles quite as much as you think he does.

[15:06] Do you know what they did? They drove him out of the synagogue and tried to throw him off a cliff. All for saying that maybe God doesn't hate Gentiles. Now that's the extreme reaction. That's a group of people who really, really do hate the Gentiles.

In this here, Paul describes a dividing wall of hostility. Remember he said that, I think it's in verse 14. Now in the temple, which was the center of Jewish worship, there was the inner courts that only Israel, only the Jewish people were allowed into.

And then there was the court of the Gentiles. There was literally a physical wall dividing the two.

Now, in an architectural dig, there was found a marble sign about a meter wide which said this.

And it was at the wall, the entrance through from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the Israelites. No foreigner may enter within this barrier and enclosure around the temple.

Anyone who was caught doing so will only have himself to blame for his ensuing death. Anybody ever seen a sign which says trespassers will be prosecuted?

[16:24] This says trespassers will be executed. The Jews really, really felt that they were separate from the Gentiles and they hated them.

Well, the feeling was mutual. The Gentiles represented in this scenario by the people of the Roman Empire equally hated the Jews.

They hated their haughty separatism. They hated the way they wouldn't mix with the rest of the people and trade and take part with everybody else. They wouldn't take part in the pagan temple worship.

They were actually called atheists because they didn't worship the gods which they worshipped.

There was definitely a massive separation between the two.

And here's the thing. Each side condemned the other side and they justified their separation. But they were wrong about the reason they were separated from each other but the reason why was because they were both separated from God.

[17:34] The Jews were separated from God because they had failed to keep the law. Yes, they had been given the law but instead of justifying them the law condemned them because they failed to keep it time after time after time.

And the Gentiles were separated from God was because the testimony that had been given to them through nature and through conscience had failed to draw them to the living God and they had rejected him and instead embraced idolatry.

So both were separate from God and therefore both were separate to each other. So what's the solution? Well there's only one solution for this problem and it's the same solution as a solution to their separation from God and that's to be reconciled to God.

Now let me just put this in human terms for a moment. if you want to be if you have a rift or a disagreement with somebody how will you reconcile to them or maybe you you're maybe an intermediary between two people who have a disagreement what's the best way to make them see eye to eye?

Is it to run through the problems or the reasons they've fallen out? The best way to make them see eye to eye is to show them something bigger and higher. If you've ever had to deal with children you probably know this.

[19:04] If your son has fallen out with your daughter do you run through all the problems that are between them? Do you run through the way that your son has wound up your daughter and run through and try and make them see eye to eye?

No what you do is you say guys I know you have disagreements but your family your brothers and sisters you make them see that they're part of something bigger and maybe they'll overlook their pretty differences.

Taking it to a much more serious level in the aftermath of the abolishing of apartheid in South Africa something was set up called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Now what this was was an opportunity for and if you don't know what apartheid is I should briefly explain that. That was where white people in South Africa where they essentially divided and ruled over the black majority in South Africa and the black majority were denied basic rights around voting and lots of other things.

So the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up and it was a chance for people to speak about the wrongs that they had been done to them but also and this is really really important for people to confess what they had done and they'd be given the chance to an amnesty of sorts.

[20 : 28] So I'm probably simplifying it a little bit there but that's I'm looking at Eloise there hopefully that's a reasonably you can speak to Eloise for maybe a bit more of a thorough explanation but that's basically what it was. People would come they could say you know what these are the things that I've done I mistreated these people in these various ways and up to a point they'd be given amnesty for the things they'd done but equally people who'd been sinned against got the chance to say what had been done to them and so what was how could they rise above this?

Well it was simply this there was very much a sense in the country at that time that there was being established a new nation South Africa was becoming a new nation they needed to get rid of these disagreements otherwise they would forever be perpetuating the same disagreements again and again and again after generation after generation.

who knows exactly how successful that was but the principle was a really really good one that we need to lift up our gaze and say well actually I know this person has done wrong to me or I know I've done wrong to this person but maybe if we lift our gaze just a bit higher maybe we can put those things aside and we can be united once more.

now what possible higher thing could we have to focus on than God and his kingdom?

Here's what it says going down to verse 19 of chapter 2 Do you get that?

[22 : 31] No longer foreigners and aliens, no longer strangers, fellow citizens with God's people, members of his household what is he talking about here?

He's talking about the church, isn't he? This is what the church is members of God's household fellow citizens now remember Paul is writing to Jews and Gentiles the differences between them were vast and yet he is saying you have been brought near, you've been united by the blood of Christ so that's what it means, it means that it means that no difference that you could possibly have with one another is greater than the connection that you have in Christ maybe you have a different nation maybe you don't even speak the same language the difference the wall that puts between you is not as great as the unity that you must have in Christ maybe maybe the differences between you are a real fundamental difference in ideology and political thought in class in gender perhaps any of these differences differences they're not so great as what unites you that means that your greatest connection should be to your brothers and sisters in Christ and I hope that you have found this to be true in your walk with Christ

I can say that for myself I believe I have found this to be true that you know I have a family I have many friends I have all sorts of connections here there and everywhere but I do believe that the greatest connection that I have the most fundamental spiritual connection the people who really really get me at my deepest level aren't ones who share my interests aren't necessarily even ones who share my blood but it's people who share that same knowledge of what it is to know Jesus and this friends is why church is so important to follow Jesus to be united with Christ isn't just about me in my miry depths being lifted up heavenwards so that I'm one with Christ it is that but it's not just that it has to be wide it has to be me having been saved having been taken out of sin having fellow brothers and sisters fellow believers alongside me helping me along the way and me in turn also hopefully helping others along the way so you see that whoever you are whatever your background wherever you've come from you absolutely have a major role to play in church life you might look at yourself and think

I'm not particularly important well Jesus thinks you are he did lay down his life for you he did make a place for you in his family in his nation but you need to be plugged in you need to be part of church life and I appreciate that by definition everybody who's in this room probably shares that to some degree at least because you have bothered at least to show up so maybe I'm speaking to the people who listen to our Spotify recording and there is a few I know there's a few but all of us have degrees of commitment to church life don't we and I would just really encourage you that you're not or at least you don't have to be on the sidelines if you're in Christ you absolutely can be fully

committed fully built in fully part of the family in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile slave nor free male nor female for you're all one in Christ

Jesus John I'm going to I'm just going to finish with one final thought it's quite a short talk considering it's a really long passage but let me just I'm going to read from chapter 3 verse verses 17 and 18 perhaps we could get up there Jill would that be okay if you can if you manage that go for my prayer and I pray that you being rooted and established in love may have power together with all the Lord's people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ the love that he has for us isn't just high and deep it's wide and it's long and it encapsulates all of us and the goodness of

[28 : 14] God to us is that he doesn't leave us on our own open to just to talk with God individually he puts us in a family together I want to just finish in prayer and I would just love us as we finish even I know it sounds a little bit corny but I would love even as we go through just to go in with a sense of I'm going to talk to somebody and I'm just going to show them that I really care about them maybe you'll give them a hug maybe you'll ask them how they're getting on because we're family together we're family in Christ thank you Lord thank you God for just your goodness to us God it would surely have been enough for you to take us out of our sin and lift us heavenwards that would have been enough that would have been more than enough that would have been an unbelievable gift of grace but you just did more than that Lord you lift your arms wide you stretched them wide and brought in the family of believers that brings all of us near it doesn't matter who we are it doesn't matter whether we're rich or poor whether we're sick or well whether we're black or white or male or female or anything else we've all been brought near by the blood of Christ and I want to pray for a just a renewed sense of family and love for one another although we live separate lives to some degree I pray God that we'd increasingly be united and knitted in made one in you encouraging one another to walk the walk of faith thank you

Lord Jesus that you lead us in everything that we do we love you Lord Amen Amen