Week 2: Ephesians 2:11-4:16

Introduction

Our previous week's study ended with an important Bible passage about our salvation – **we are saved by God's grace through our faith in Jesus Christ** (2:8-10).

This week's study begins with the historical significance of this salvific message in the context of Jews and Gentiles. **"Jews"** were descendants of Jacob (son of Isaac, son of Abraham) who were regarded as special people of God and recipients of divine promises in the Old Testament (Abrahamic covenant, Mosaic covenant, and Davidic covenant). By contrast, all non-Jews were known as **"Gentiles"** who were initially "excluded from citizenship in Israel", "foreigners to the covenants of the promise" and "without hope and without God" (2:11-12).

This was completely changed when **Jesus Christ** came on the scene. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus "destroyed the barrier" between Jews and Gentiles (2:14), **created "one new humanity out of the two", and reconciled them to God** (2:15-16). Now both Jews and Gentiles have access to God (2:18). How? By grace through faith in Christ (2:8-9). This new humanity that Jesus created and reconciled, as one body of believers, became **the Church** (2:15-22). Paul used the metaphor of an architecture to describe the Church: Jesus is the chief cornerstone; teachings of the apostles and prophets are the foundation; believers are various parts being joined together; and God's presence would dwell in it (2:19-22).

Paul regarded himself as "a servant of this gospel" (3:7) and was **compelled to preach this good news** to others (3:8-12). His prayer was for the Ephesians to be rooted in and filled by this love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (3:16-19).

Paul then turned to the applications of his teachings. Starting from chapter 4, Paul set out how believers should "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (4:1), in particular, to live in unity with diversity and to grow spiritually mature to the fullness of Christ (4:3-16).

Warm-up question

Imagine you're now in heaven, and you see someone who used to annoy you a lot is also in heaven. What would you say to him/her or how would you react?

Read Ephesians 2:11-22 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

1-a. Describe in your own words what "reconciliations" Jesus has accomplished.

- Hint: Jesus has accomplished a two-fold reconciliation – horizontal and vertical. Identify both of them from Eph 2:14-16.

1-b. Believers are called to be peacemakers (Matt 5:9) and given "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). Do you find reconciliation with others easy or difficult? In your experience, what made it possible, and what was challenging?

- Note: "Forgiveness" is different from "reconciliation". Forgiving someone is similar to cancelling a debt – you no longer regard that person owing anything to you. This can happen entirely in your own heart without that person knowing or apologising. Reconciliation is a second step which must involve the other person, aiming to restore the relationship, but is contingent upon the willingness of the other person. God calls us to forgive one another (Matt 6:14-15; 18:21-22) and, to the extent possible, pursue reconciliation as a response to the reconciliation that Jesus accomplished for us (2 Cor 5:18).

Read Eph 3:7-21

2. Paul as a "servant of the gospel" felt compelled to share the gospel despite sufferings (Eph 3:8-12). Gospel means "good news", including the message of salvation (Eph 2:1-10) and reconciliation through Jesus (Eph 2:11-22). Do you feel motivated to share this gospel even when facing hardship – why or why not? How do you usually share it with others?

Read Eph 4:1-16

3. Paul stressed the importance of unity (4:1-6) and diversity (4:11-13) of believers, ultimately leading to maturity and growth (4:14-16). In particular, "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (4:3). It is not uncommon to encounter disagreements and conflicts within the church. Why is it so hard to uphold unity and peace among believers? How can believers strive for unity with diversity?

Prayer Letter Exercise

(a) Read Eph 2:13-22 again and reflect on the "cost" that Jesus paid to reconcile us with the Father.

(b) Think of one person whom you know you need to forgive or reconcile with (and it's alright even if you're not feeling ready to forgive or reconcile with that person yet).

(c) Write down his/her name and a brief description of the issue between you and that person, and write down a prayer (e.g. you may pray for your own heart, or for that person, or for the ongoing relationship).

(d) Put your letter into an envelop and seal it, then pray:

Jesus, thank You for reconciling me to my Heavenly Father by Your blood on the cross, so that I am no longer a foreigner or stranger, but a fellow citizen of God's Kingdom and a member of God's household. Thank You for giving me the ministry of reconciliation. I pray that You will heal the wounds, emotions, or pain that I am still going through with regard to this person. I pray that You will soften my heart and help me see this person from Your perspective. I pray that You will help this person too. Please help me in pursuing forgiveness and reconciliation – at Your will, at Your timing. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

(e) If you feel comfortable, pass your envelop to your leader/facilitator, who will redistribute them to you at the end of this season. Let's see how God may work in your heart and in that person's heart in the coming weeks.