

God's power in overcoming division

We see the greatness of God's power in three ways. When God brought Jesus into the world He showed His great power

- (i) in the resurrection of Jesus (Ephesians 1:1 9b–23),
- (ii) in the spiritual resurrection of unsaved people (Ephesians 2:1–10), and – as we now shall see –
- (iii) in overcoming the hatred between different sections of the human race (Ephesians 2:11–22).

• God's purpose to bring all things together in Christ

We have seen that the purpose of God in this gospel age in which we now live is to bring together all things in Christ, things in heaven and things in earth – in Him!¹ Men and women are hateful towards each other. God and man are mutual enemies. Tribes and nationalities are full of bitterness and rivalry. God's plan is to bring His world back together again in unity by putting it under Christ! He begins with His people. He creates united people in this world, His bride, the body of Christ, the church. Then He will bring the world under judgement and remove from the world everything that does not submit to His plan. Ephesians 2:11–22 and 4:1–16 pursue this matter that Paul mentioned back in Ephesians 1:10.

• The greatest division – Jews and Gentiles

Ephesians 2:11–22 explains this third way of seeing the greatness of God's power. Ephesians 2:11–22 is the basis of Christian unity. It tells how God has broken down every kind of hostility between groups of people. This is one of the main themes of Ephesians. There are so many kinds of division among people: divisions that concern skin-colour, tribe, nationality, wealth or class, temperament, education, area of country, language. Paul begins with the greatest division of all history, the animosity between Jew and gentile.

Ephesians 2:11–22 divides as follows.

- Ephesians 2:11–12: what the Ephesians were.
- Ephesians 2:13–18: what God did for them.
- Ephesians 2:19–22: what their position is now.

• The Gentiles outside the professing people of God

The difficulty in the way of any gentiles being saved was not only that they were 'dead in trespasses and sins'¹ they were also outside of the professing people of God, the Jews. To save gentiles God not only had to deal with their sinfulness, He also had to deal with their position: outside of the people of God, and despised by the professing people of God, the Jews. There was a difference between the Jews and the gentiles, but the Jews had turned this into a barrier. There is nothing wrong with differences among people, but we should never turn a difference into a barrier.

• God hates discrimination

God hates discrimination. God loves the world; He shows no discrimination. Discrimination always involves

- (i) pride,
- (ii) a blindness concerning the other person's viewpoint,
- (iii) a wrong sense of values – as though external matters were what counted.

Discrimination can be found amongst religious people. When people turn their convictions about God into barriers you have a terrible form of discrimination. There is only one way of overcoming discrimination – that is when both sides come to Jesus Christ.

The despised position of the Gentiles

Consider first the despised position of the gentiles (Ephesians 2:11–12).

1. 'In the flesh'

1. **They were 'gentiles in the flesh'**. Paul says, '*So remember then that you – you who were once gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision, made in the flesh by human hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world*'¹

¹ 1:10

¹ 2:1-3

¹ 2:12

With regard to their physical descent, the Ephesian Christians were once outside the people whom God had chosen for blessing, believers among the nation of Israel. These Ephesian Christians had been gentiles. There was a terrible hatred between Jews and gentiles. Gentiles hated the Jews as proud people. Jews thought gentiles were inferior. They despised the gentiles.

2. Uncircum-sised

2. **They were ‘called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands’.** They were sneered at by the Jews. The Jews gloried in their physical circumcision. But it was only something external.

3. Without Christ

3. **They were ‘without Christ’.** Even in Old Testament times the Jewish people had ‘Christ’. They did not know the name Jesus, but the Old Testament spoke of the coming Saviour. People like Abraham looked forward to the coming of Jesus. In this sense they had ‘Christ’.

4. Aliens from the common-wealth of Israel

4. **The gentiles were ‘aliens from the commonwealth of Israel’.** Israel was a community who knew something of the coming Saviour. They had many privileges. The law kept them from being as bad as they might be. God had done wonderful things in their history. They had the Word of God and the predictions of a Saviour.

5. Strangers from the covenants of promise

5. **They were ‘strangers from to covenants of promise’.** In the Old Testament God had given covenants – special promises which He swore to fulfil. They were
 (i) the oath which He made to Abraham to bring a Saviour out of the line of Abraham,
 (ii) the oath to David that the Saviour would come in his line,
 (iii) the promise of a new covenant which would be greater than the covenant of law that God gave Israel through Moses. The new covenant started in Israel. The gentiles knew nothing of all of this.

6. No hope

6. **They were ‘having no hope’.** They had no hope in this life. They had no hope that their life would ever be any different. The gentiles were degraded and slaves to sin. They had no hope that God would ever come to help them. They had no hope beyond death.

7. Without God

7. **They were ‘without God’.** God was not working in their lives in any obvious way. They were under the wrath of God^{□1} and could not have a close relationship to Him.

8. In the world

8. **They were ‘in the world’.** As Paul has said all sinners everywhere have an anti-God spirit, ruled by the devil.^{□1} Israel knew something of the revelations of God’s Saviour. The gentiles did not even have that but were wholly ‘in the world’ that was abandoned temporarily by God.

The coming of Jesus into the lives of gentiles was a staggering miracle!

□1 2:3

□1 2:1-3

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