

One New Humanity in Jesus Christ

1. **Remember Our Former Separation in Sin (11-12)**

- a. "Remember" is an imperative, a command (present tense, possible implication to continue remembering)
 - i. We are told to "remember" who we "formerly" (*ποτε*) were
 - ii. There is a danger in forgetting where we've come from and where we've been, for without these, we will "misremember" and presume upon God's grace to us.
 1. The danger of presumption is that we feel that we've earned God's kindness and obligated Him to our blessings.
 2. Remembering our separation from God is not a means to groveling or sadness, but rather to rejoicing over the greatness of God's grace and as such is a means to worship Him to greater degree and intimacy
- b. **Separated Racially & Religiously**
 - i. Gentiles: any non-Jew, the "nations"
 - ii. Called the uncircumcised
 1. "uncircumcised", from "*akrobustia*", not the word opposite of circumcised (*aperitemetos*), is a hateful word "foreskins", very much in-line with contempt racial vulgarities (Don Imus' "nappy headed"; "cracker")
 - It's as if Paul wants the Ephesians to remember the spite and hatred that they felt when they were called "foreskins" by their enemies
 - He wants them to see *their* previous desire for separation and animosity from the Jews
 2. A different people than the covenant community of Israel, with different gods and different purposes as shown by the fleshly rite of circumcision, the sign of Abram
 - iii. By the so-called circumcised
 1. The "circumcised" were those who put their trust in their responses to the covenant of grace, rather than in God and His grace itself
 2. "so-called" because Paul is making a slightly backhanded comment about the outward act of circumcision (made by human hands), which has no salvific power, and the inward circumcisions of the heart (resulting in faith in Jesus) which shows a true child of Abraham who is justified by God
 - See Rom 2:28-29
"For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly; and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man, but from God."
 - Romans 4
 - Colossians 2:11-14
 3. It is a racial divide, the Jewish leadership separating themselves from the Gentiles unless they converted to their outward standards
 - Thus setting up a law apart from faith
 - In Judaism, one must become Jewish ritually to be part of the faith
- c. **Separated from the Christ**
 - i. Though we knew of God we did not honor Him *as God*
 - ii. Basing our goodness upon our sacrifices, seeing *no need for a savior or chosen one*
 1. We were still trying to obligate the gods through our sacrifices and through our righteousness, there was no Messiah for the Gentiles, for there was no perceived need

- 2. We all have “gods” even if we were irreligious
 - Gods of wealth, power, success, tolerance, niceness, etc. (expound)
- iii. Colossians 1:21-23
- d. **Separated from the Community:** Excluded from Israel, God's chosen people
 - i. The covenants, promises, patriarchs, etc. all belong to Israel
 - ii. Israel is the keeper of the promises, chosen by grace
 - 1. God chose Abraham and made him promises of a people to belong to God
 - 2. Gentiles were not in the community of Israel which had the words of God and the oracles of faith (even though they had been twisted to be based upon the outward act of circumcision, rather than faith, Rom 3:1-8)
 - 3. “You will be my people, I will be your God” – Ezekiel 36:28
- e. **Separated from the Promises:** Foreigners to the covenants of promise
 - i. We did not even have the covenants of promise (“I will bless you”)
 - ii. God swooped down to us in grace to include us within these promises in Christ.
 - iii. We have been grafted into His gracious plan of redemption through the promises to Israel in the person of Jesus Christ
- f. **Separated from the Hope:** With no hope AND without God
 - i. As gentiles, we had no hope of *the promises of God's grace*; we had only obligation and failure, guilt and condemnation for these failures, fears of retribution from God, and no fellowship with the loving and true God.
 - ii. We were hopeless and isolated from the joyful peace of knowing God as God and in His glorious grace toward us in His promised deliverance and nearness.

“Remember that you were formerly Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless.” –William Hendriksen

2. **Recognize Our Present Position by Grace Through the Blood of Jesus (12-13)**

- a. Paul moves to the ‘great adversative’, “but now”
 - i. We don’t merely remember our former separation, but in the light of this separation, we gaze on the wondrous grace of God in our reconciliation
 - ii. The enemies have been made friends
 - 1. “formerly separate from Christ” and now “in Christ”
- b. Brought near in the blood of Christ
 - i. Formerly “far off” and now “near” in Jesus
 - 1. Typically in Scripture the Gentile nations were seen as “far off” (Deut. 28:49; Is 5:26) while Israel was seen as “near” (Ps 148:12).
 - 2. Now, we are near “in Christ”, not by becoming a Jew, but only “in Christ Jesus”
 - ii. It is the redemptive substitutionary act of Jesus’ death on the cross that brought us near, nothing else!
 - 1. We don’t find our inclusion into this new race based upon any other factor
 - 2. It is only in the central act of the atonement of Jesus on our behalf
 - iii. We are not brought near, or nearer, to God based upon any self-formed status, but completely upon the status of Jesus Christ given to us by grace
 - 1. Obedience is not bring us nearer to God, but rather because we want to know Him more

3. Reconciled into the New Humanity in Jesus (14-16)

- a. He is our peace
 - i. We did not, and do not, become reconciled to God because of our race, our religion, our socio-economic status, or the sacrifices that we made
 - ii. It is in Jesus Christ alone that we are *given* reconciliation. He is our peace, not the principles, not the laws, not our ability to conform to biblical commands, but HIM, the Christ of the Cross!!

“In a profound sense, the arms of Christ spreadeagles on the cross in his final agony become a fitting symbol of his sacrifice’s achievement. With one outstretched arm he grasps believing Israelites, and with the other he grasps believing Gentiles; and, in his person offered up in holy oblation, he unites the two. Accordingly, ‘he himself is our peace, who has made the two one.’” (Bruce Milne, *Dynamic Diversity*)
- b. He has made the two peoples into one through grace
 - i. The gospel shows us that we are all in great need of Jesus Christ to bring us back to God
 1. We have failed every law and fallen victim to sin in every way
 2. But God’s grace reaches beyond every failure and deep past the heart of sin to miraculously raise us up to new life by faith in Jesus Christ alone
 - ii. No matter your race, culture, gender, social status
 1. Rom 3:29-30 (justifies the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by faith); Galatians 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; Colossians 3:11
 2. All of these things are standards by which we separate ourselves based upon some form of “rightness” or “distinction” of our goodness
 3. The gospel eliminates these distinctions *as foundations for our righteousness* and places them in their proper place, we are one in Christ all the same way: by His grace, through faith, for His glory
- c. He destroyed the barrier of hostility
 - i. by nullifying (rendered inoperative) the power of the law's commandments in ordinances
 - ii. NOT “abolished” as some English translations, but simply “rendered inoperative”, thus “nullify” when relating to a law or decree.
 - iii. Jesus fulfilled the Law, in both obeying it fully and earning its blessing, and by taking our sin and bearing its curse.
 1. He destroyed all that we stand on for acceptance before God (race, religion, etc.)
 2. He became the sole unifier between us and God, and us and each other.
 3. He made the Law inoperative *as the means of our nearness to God*, given the current context.
- d. He made the two separated peoples into one new humanity
 - i. Not one individual, but one new entity of recipients of God’s grace, one new humanity
 1. A 2nd century letter to Diogenes called Christians the “third race”
 2. He made Jews and Gentiles brothers and sisters.
 3. It is not that Gentiles are made Jews, nor are Jews made Gentiles, but we are all made into one NEW humanity in Christ: the third race, Christian
 - **A new race that is raceless!** – Harold Hoehner
 - ii. All come to God the same way: Grace through Jesus Christ!
 1. Racism is to be abolished in the church
 - All disdain, stereotypical comments, feelings of superiority and inferiority are to be expelled and judged as sin

- Do not let each other hold onto racist feelings or feelings of superiority over others peoples or cultures.
 - The fact that God has done all the work in the gospel, from election to our security in the heavens for all of eternity, is incredibly humbling and destroys any basis for our pride toward another person, race, culture, faith, or creed
2. Classism is to be abolished in the church
 - All disdain, stereotypical comments, feelings of superiority and inferiority are to be expelled and judged as sin
 - We cannot allow distinctions of worth or importance to be set upon individuals or families based upon anything other than Jesus' shed blood and sacrifice: not money, not possessions, not history, not language, etc.
 3. Religion is to be abolished in the church
 - People are not brought near to God based upon their observance of the Mosaic Law (10 commandments), but rather "in Christ"
 - We do not make separations between "them" and "us" on the basis of the Law, but rather on the basis of the law of Christ (the One presented in Scripture)
 - i. Does this mean that we do not use discipline in the church? NO, it does not! Rather, we discipline according to the standard of the gospel, the law of Christ (faith as Savior and as Master)
 - ii. See Matt 18; 2 Thess 3:6-16; Gal 6:1-10; Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5:11ff
 - iii. An unrepentant heart is reason to believe that one does not "get" grace and is not trusting in Jesus.
 1. This person needs to be warned and admonished for the opportunity to repent
 2. If unrepentant, he needs to be viewed as unsaved and admonished to repent and believe
- iii. Anything in which we make judgments of superiority or inferiority is not based upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is based upon some law, some principle or standard which we set up to make ourselves out to be better than someone else. In so doing, we nullify Christ's work and cause division, factions, envy, injustice, cruelty, and all from the root of all sin and the cause of the devil's fall: pride.
- e. He reconciled both to God
- i. Through the cross!
 1. The Church, the New Humanity, is completely a new creative act of God!
 2. Paul uses the word "κτίζω", or "created", the same word used of God's creative act of the Universe.
 3. He created this New Humanity through the cross of Christ
"In his death Christ *does* things; 'While our death is our fate, his death is his deed.'" (John Murray)
 - ii. Killing the hostility in Himself (or, by the cross)
 1. The cross creates community by eliminating all the distinctions between Jew and Gentile.
 2. He not only killed the hostility between us and God (enemies of God,v2), but also between us and other peoples.
 3. The only basis that we have for our standing before God and even before each other is the Gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ. Here we are all equally guilty, and by faith all equally redeemed. It is about Jesus.
 - iii. The Church is the foremost act of God "bringing all things together under Christ"
 1. The Church, saved by God's grace, exemplifies God's reconciliation

2. Are we exemplifying God's grace in reconciliation, enemies become friends?

4. Relate to Others as One New Humanity: Christian (17-18)

- a. The Jew and the Gentile both needed the preaching of peace
 - i. The religious and the irreligious both needed to hear the Gospel of peace.
 - ii. Regardless of knowledge, experience, or position, we were all equal as enemies of God.

- b. All peoples, no matter the race, gender, status, economies, governmental system, or religious background can only come to God through the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - i. Access to the Father is through the Spirit of Christ alone
 - ii. Both have equal and impartial access to the Father
 - iii. All of this is through Jesus Christ alone by faith alone

- c. The GOOD NEWS, indeed!!!
 - i. We *can* now come to God based upon Jesus Christ's merit!
 - ii. Good news for failures of the religious and the irreligious, for the African, the European, the Asian, the American, the man, the woman, the child, the beautiful, the deformed, the poor, the rich, but always to the humble.
 - iii. We must see the church, the New Humanity, as large and stupendous the miracle as it truly is: the Body of Christ where every other human distinction is overwhelmed and overcome by the blood of Jesus.

Conclusion:

REMEMBER who you were; RELATE as one saved by grace; REJOICE in what Jesus has done; RETURN your worship and your joy to the Lord for His wonderful and amazing grace to you and to others who have humbled themselves to receive His wonderful gift!

The implications of this gracious gift of Jesus Christ are tremendously important to the function of the church. As the New Humanity, the Body of Christ in this world, we are the showpiece of God's grace, the place where distinctions of race and culture break down and find their melting point in Jesus, the crucified and risen Son of God. This means that you, O humbled Church, are the premiere testament of God's reconciliation to the world. You, O humbled Church, are the evidence of the resurrected Jesus, in whom God has proclaimed to the world His glory and now through His testimony in your new Humanity as well. This means, EBF, that we are to be active in grace, unified in the gospel of grace, humble in our vision of ourselves and of our great and glorious God, and bold to give up our own power in order to glorify Him. We are to be centrally about the glory of God in our midst, the Creator of this New Humanity and the Worker of all that is Good for us and in us. It is to the glory of God that we have been united in Jesus alone, that no law or system or racial boundaries stand between God and man in Christ! He is seen in this new creation of reconciled sinners made saints. And He is glorified for being the One bringing all things together under the great Reconciler: Jesus the Reconciler, though the blood of His cross. Worship Him! Worship Him! Worship Him!