

Ephesians: Resources and Responsibilities
Part 6
“Breaking Down Barriers”
Ephesians 2:11-22
Pastor Charles Price

Well let me read to you then from Ephesians Chapter 2, and I am going to read from Verse 11. If you have been with us in recent weeks you know that we have been several weeks already looking into this letter of Paul to the Ephesians.

And in the first part of Chapter 2 he talks about the fact that by nature we are dead but we have been raised to life with Christ. And he is talking about the severance of our relationship with God and our reconciliation to God.

Now in the second part of this chapter he talks about the alienation that we experience with one another, the brokenness of human relationships which derives from the cause of the brokenness of our relationship with God. And he speaks in particular about the Jews and the Gentiles. I am going to read it to you from Verse 11 where he says,

“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men) – 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.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.

“His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

“He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

“For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s 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 here’s the key verse, if you like, the last verse:

“And in him you too are being built together” (that is Jew and Gentile) “to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

Keep your Bible open there.

Recently some of us were in Israel and we travelled one day on a bus from the Lake of Galilee up into the Golan Heights and right up to the Syrian border. On the bus that I was on – and there were 12 different buses in the group – on the bus I was on, we pulled off the road and went up a dirt trail up high to a pinnacle in the Golan Height where you looked down on the other side on Syria.

And we stopped the bus right next to miles and miles of rolled up barbed wire and behind it a fence. And then there was a stretch of no-man’s land and then on the other side there was another fence and more rolls of barbed wire. And beyond that, you could see the Syrian town and the mosques and so on.

There were burned out tanks and personnel carriers that reminded us of some of the severe battles that have been fought up there in the last four or five decades. Right now it is a time of relative quiet. There were no Israeli military on the Israeli side at the point at which we were. Nor could we see any Syrian military on the other side, though they could be mobilized very quickly.

But in between this stretch of no-man’s land was patrolled by the United Nations in their white armoured vehicles with the familiar UN on the side.

Don’t miss the irony of this: the United Nations keeping two nations apart – Syria and Israel.

There is a lot of unresolved conflict in our world. We see it on the global and political scale. The Korean Peninsula has been divided since 1950 – North Korea in the north, South Korea in the south. Again, barricades dividing them through which hardly anybody has crossed in the last sixty years, and is today a source of tension in the world.

Sudan is divided between the north and the south.

Kashmir, on the Pakistan border, through part of India, is a place of tension and turmoil.

The Israeli and Palestinian territories of course are now divided by a solid wall of partition. And as you go there, you see this wall snaking its way over the hills and valleys to divide those two and to stop suicide bombers coming over to the other side.

Now Paul has something to say about this here in Ephesians Chapter 2, about the fact that the human race is a race that is divided.

Now in particular he talks here about the division between the Jew and the Gentile. That is the particular context about which he is writing, but there are principles that we can derive from this that apply to other areas of division and tension and breakdown in human relationships.

If in the first ten verses of Ephesians 2, our condition is that we are dead because we are separated from the life of God – that’s the human and divine relationship; the result of that in Verses 11 down to Verse 22 is having been dead, we are distant and divided from one another.

And in these verses he doesn’t just express the problem, he also talks about the only solution that reconciles human beings to God and reconciles human beings with human beings.

You see God’s agenda is much bigger than the individual reconciliation of human beings to himself (you over there, you over there, somebody up there, me down here, and it’s just an individual relationship with God). Rather he is creating in those reconciled people a new community or a new humanity that is united in Jesus Christ.

That’s why the doctrine of the church is not just a doctrine of a club for like-minded people to come to in order to get warmed up once in a while, but the church is itself the goal of the gospel. There is a new community of men and women, boys and girls who are united together in Jesus Christ and become a community that impacts and changes the world in which we are located.

I think I have quoted this before. Stuart Briscoe said in my hearing on one occasion that when God created Adam He created an individual. When He created Eve He created something completely different – He created society.

Now, said Stuart Briscoe, if the answer to the fallen individual is Christ, the answer to the fallen society is the church. The answer to the fallen individual is we are reconciled to God. The answer to the fallen society is, as Verse 22 says, that,

“In Him we are being built together to be a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit,”

That there is a togetherness that is an outworking of the gospel in our lives.

Now let me follow with you Paul’s argument in these verses and I want to talk about two things: I want to talk about the dilemma of disunity, first of all, and then we will talk about the dynamic of unity, which he addresses here.

First of all, let’s talk about the dilemma of disunity. And he is talking about the hostility that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. And there was reason for this.

The Jewish people, in their father Abraham, had been set apart by God to fulfill His purposes. And the Gentiles were not part of that particular purpose which God chose the Jewish people.

And so he says in Verse 12 that the Jewish people had citizenship in Israel, they had the covenants of the promise, they had hope and they had God.

In contrast, the Gentiles were without any of these. So he says in Verse 12, he says, “Remember that you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise. You were without hope and without God in the world. In other words, you were Christ-less, state-less, hopeless and God-less.”

In later verses he uses these kinds of words to describe their condition. He talks about being separated, about being excluded, about being foreigners. He talks about a barrier. He talks about a dividing wall. He talks about hostility. He talks about being far away. And he talks about being aliens.

These are all in these verses we just read together. These are isolating words; they are debilitating words.

So the Jews and the Gentiles were different and the Jews knew this especially. Paul quotes them, speaking derogatively about the Gentiles, when he says in Verse 11 – he says,

“You who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision”.

He says the people who calls themselves “the circumcision” (that’s who we are); you are “un” – you are a non-entity, uncircumcised.” That’s how they regarded them.

And you see, what has happened is that the differences between Jews and Gentiles had become divisions between Jews and Gentiles. And the Jews divided up the world into “us” and “them”. “Them” was everybody else.

Now the *differences* between Jew and Gentile were of God, they are excusable, but the *divisions* between Jew and Gentile were not of God and are inexcusable.

The purpose for the Jews was that they would bless the world and therefore their presence would enrich the Gentiles. Instead they became elite and arrogant and looked down their noses at the “them”, the “uncircumcised”.

William Barclay, who has written commentaries on every book of the New Testament, and if you read him, just be careful of his theology in some areas, but he is well regarded as an authority on a lot of the historical context of the New Testament, and he is valuable to read for that reason.

And this is what William Barclay says. He says,

“The Jew had developed an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that He has made.

It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother at her time of birth, for that would be to help bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came,” says Barclay, “until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral service of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death.”

And that actually carried down through the centuries. My great great grandmother was a Jewess from the City of Nottingham in England. And she married a Gentile.

And on the day of her wedding, her family carried an empty coffin through the streets of Nottingham with her name on it and they buried the coffin and never, ever did anyone in her family have anything to do with her again. They said, “You are dead as far as we are concerned.”

You know the Orthodox Jew began each day thanking God for three things: “God, I thank You that I am not a slave, God I thank You that I am not a woman, God I thank You that I am not a Gentile.”

Something has become very poisonous. This elitism created this immense arrogance and although it was not legitimate, they could rationalize it. It was difficult even to root some of this out in the early church because the biggest

controversy in the early church was if a Gentile becomes a Christian, does he first have to become a Jew? Does he have to be circumcised if he is male?

That was the first big controversy. They had a gathering in Jerusalem to discuss it and when they met in Jerusalem, there were those in Acts 15:1 who said, “Unless you are circumcised you cannot be saved. If you want to be one of God’s people, you have got to become one of us.”

Actually it’s the reverse. If you become God’s people, then you become one of a much wider community.

It lingered, although they made a decision (no, you don’t have to be circumcised). Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians about this, and a letter was circulated amongst the existing churches at the time.

But years later when Paul came to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey, he brought with him a friend from Ephesus (who he is writing to now), and this friend was a Gentile.

His name was Trophimus (probably called him Troph) and when Paul got back to Jerusalem, the elders of the church met him and said, “Paul, we have some good news and some bad news. The good news is a lot of Jews have been converted. The bad news is many of them are still zealous for the law and they have heard that you are against Moses and they don’t like that.”

And so they made a suggestion as to how Paul might help to rectify that problem. The reason for that was of course Paul taking a strong stand on the “you don’t need to be circumcised”. That was interpreted as a rejection of the Law of Moses.

And one day when he was there he went into the temple area, which he as a Jew was allowed to do, but his friend Trophimus, the Gentile was not allowed to do that. And so Paul didn’t take him there. There was a wall (no doubt what Paul is referring to “He took out the dividing wall of hostility”) and you could not take a Gentile beyond that wall.

And Paul went beyond it and people thought he had taken Trophimus, which he hadn’t, and when he came out there was a crowd waiting, wanted to lynch him. He got arrested.

He ended up being kept in prison for up to five years, all over this issue. Two years in Caesarea; took him to Rome; his boat sank on the way; ended up shipwrecked for winter in Malta; eventually he arrived in Rome and two years in Rome, and five wasted years from every human perspective because of this dividing wall of hostility that Paul talks about here.

Now in Ephesus, when Paul had gone there, the first believers were Jews. He had gone to the synagogue and preached there for three months. Many had become believers, and at the end of three months the leaders kicked him out of the synagogue. He rented the lecture hall of Tyrannus and he spoke there everyday for two years.

And it tells us that during those two years - it says that many Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia believed and the gospel spread and there was a great work of God that had taken place there.

And now he writes to them and he says, “Look there are Jews in the church there in Ephesus and there are Gentiles in the church there in Ephesus and some of these tensions that exist between you both are very hard to let go of and very hard to die.”

And so that’s why he writes about this. Now that’s not a problem for us here. Not many of us are wrapped up in the issue of if we’re Gentile, well there’s a problem not being Jew, or if we are Jew, looking down our noses at those who are Gentile. That’s not a problem for us.

But there are general principles in this incident that may apply to us today. You see there are legitimate differences that exist between people that become illegitimate divisions.

Some of those are very simple things such as age, for instance. We now have a word for it; we call it ageism – prejudice against people on the grounds of their age.

Now it’s not new. When Paul wrote to Timothy, when Timothy was in Ephesus, he said, “Don’t let anybody look down on you because you are young.”

Because Timothy was young, there were those who were prejudiced against him, and his youthfulness. He doesn’t have the experience, doesn’t have the maturity. He said, “Don’t let them prejudice against you because you are young.”

In the same book he says, “Treat older men as fathers and older women as mothers.”

On the other side, “Hey, you young people, you may have some role in this church that gives you leadership but,” he says “don’t you forget the older people. Treat them as fathers. The older women, treat them as mothers.”

So these things can grow into our lives and we feel people have value at a certain time in their lives and that value is less so, either when they are young or when they are old.

There can be gender prejudices. There are legitimate differences of course, between male and female. When those differences become a grounds of division and often regarding in a derogatory manner, usually the male towards the female, then those divisions become wrong.

Race – and we’re all from different races; we all have a race into which we were born. And those differences are legitimate. But when they become divisions – and my own race, the Anglo-Saxon white race has been especially guilty of this in the last couple of centuries, appallingly so and tragically so.

Culture is different and legitimate but when we begin to feel that one culture – usually my culture – is superior to another or sometimes somebody else’s culture is superior to mine and so we feel intimidated, then the difference becomes a division.

We have different abilities and we rejoice in that. We all have different abilities, but when those abilities somehow create a sort of pecking order where one level of ability and skill looks down its nose at other abilities and skills, the differences have become divisions.

And when differences become divisions, they become destructive.

Now Paul’s purpose is not to highlight the division; his purpose is to highlight the reconciliation in those areas where there is division.

And so my second point, if I talk about the dilemma of disunity, which exists, he talks about the dynamic of unity and he writes about reconciliation. In Verse 13 he says,

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

Notice that. He says your reconciliation is in Christ. That is the phrase he uses about 20 times in this letter. And to be more explicit, “you have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

Later in Verse 15 and 16, he says,

“His purpose was...that in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”

Now here’s a very important thing we need to understand from what he is saying here: that if this reconciliation is in Christ and we are brought near through the blood of Christ and we’re made one through the cross of Christ, then it tells us that division and fragmentation is at root a spiritual issue and that it is properly

rectified only when it begins at the cross of Christ and through the blood of Christ and being put in Christ.

It's our alienation from God that is the cause of our human alienation from one another. And we're not going to put, if I may speak in these terms, the horizontal right until the vertical – not that God is up there, but I think you know what I mean by that – we are not going to put the horizontal divisions right until the vertical division has been put right.

Which is why the first half of Chapter 2 is about getting reconciled to God. “You who were dead are made alive with Christ.” And now, in the second part: “And you who are divided are made one in Christ.”

Back in the 1970's I was in South Africa and attended the South African Congress on Mission and Evangelism, which was an event, which drew together many Christian leaders from all across South Africa.

In the 70's the apartheid regime was fully in control and it was a divided country. Whites were allowed to sit on some benches in the park and non-whites sat on other benches. That's how the division was made – whites and non-whites.

You could go into a certain hotel if you were one color and you would go to another hotel if you were another color. And it was divided right through the society.

This conference gathered where everybody, black and white, were to live together in the same hotel and they had to have a suspension of the law; parliament had to agree to that for this event.

And I know everything took place together in one place.

Billy Graham was there and there was a public meeting held. There were about 600 in the Congress, but there was a public meeting to which about 60,000 people came, totally integrated, and Billy Graham preached at that.

On the first night of the Congress, Michael Cassidy, who was the chairman of it, and who has had a very significant influence in South Africa, in his welcoming address said, “It is very likely over these ten days that we are going to become divided over different issues. There are hurts that lie very deeply and they are going to come out. There is pain, there is prejudice; there is fear. And these things, in the course of these ten days, are likely to surface. There are going to be misunderstandings.”

But he said, “I want us at the beginning of this Congress to agree to something together and it's this: if we get separated, let's agree that we will meet together at the foot of the cross.”

And actually it was quite a tumultuous time. There was division; there were people walking out of the main session.

But meeting together at the foot of the cross is not something sentimental; it is saying that what has caused this division is actually sin and we meet on the basis of forgiveness. That's what the blood of Christ he talks about refers to, for it is the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin.

And that's why reconciliation begins at the cross whereas Paul says there in Verse 13,

“In Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

You have been brought back to God, reconciled with Him, made right with Him, and that changes your relationships with each other.

And then he says in Verse 14, speaking of Christ,

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”

So he says Christ is our peace. And then in Verse 15 he says,

“His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace.”

And in Verse 17:

“He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.”

Now notice the sequence there. He Himself is our peace; He is making peace, and He came and preached peace. What He is He goes on making; what He is making, He goes on proclaiming, says Paul.

And then,

“Consequently,” he says in Verse 19, “you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's 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.”

Now what he is saying there is this: forget about trying to be right with other people if you are not going to get right with God. You can get right but it will be superficial and it will likely erupt again.

Now, he says, you first come to the cross of Christ, be reconciled to God, because what unites us together and what was designed to unite us together was the presence of God within us.

What happened at the fall was that we became separated from the life of God and hence he says you are dead (in Verse 1). As a result you are now distant and divided.

Let me try and illustrate this. I – it’s not a rosary in case any of you are worried; neither do I normally wear this. But this is a necklace, a lot of beads all strung together. And what holds these beads together is of course the string, which unites them.

We were created to be the dwelling place of the Spirit of God. That was God’s intention for us. But something happened in the fall, and what happened in the fall is that we became separated from the life of God.

Now if I take a pair of scissors here and for those of you listening on radio, by the way, I have a lovely necklace in my hand. If I take a pair of scissors in my hand and I cut it, what happens to the beads? (I am going to be sliding all over the place now.)

Every bead, which once had an identity given to it by the presence of the string, which held them together and were united together and functioned together, had a common identity, suddenly they are all over the place.

And if I tried to put these things back together without the string, what is going to happen? How do I get these things to relate to each other? No, get them back onto the string. (Let me get rid of these.)

The point is this you see, that in Ephesians 1 he says somebody cut the string. You are dead. You are separated from the life of God. And the result is you are a bunch of beads all over the place, divided, distant, alienated, foreigners; there is hostility; these are all words that he uses here.

But now in Christ, you recognize your own sin and need. You come back and you are forgiven and you are cleansed and you are indwelt again by the life of the Spirit of God.

(And I have got another one here too.) And you are made one. You are being built in Him as a dwelling place for the string; the Spirit of God unites us together.

When we look at all the discord in our world, we tend to address the issues as being primarily political or economic. And of course there are political issues and economic issues, but unless we see that the fundamental need of the human being is spiritual, these things might stick a few occasional odd beads together for a while but they won't restore the unity and the oneness.

And that's why, you see, we have to be utterly convinced of this: that being a Christian is not just a little part of my life that is isolated from the workplace and isolated from where I live and isolated from the politics of our city and our country and the economics of our country and our world, but rather the deepest need of the human heart is a spiritual one.

And it only begins by being reconciled to God, and having been reconciled to God, then the fragmentation that is inevitable when we are detached from God also begins to be rectified. You are being built together to be a dwelling in which God lives by His Holy Spirit.

Now let me give you a totally unrealistic illustration of this, and it's unrealistic because the human heart is what it is.

Ever since 1950 North and South Korea have been divided and every once in a while, of course, there are verbal and more recently, physical attacks made by one on the other. It's a loggerhead situation, which in the present status quo seems to have any hope of bringing about any kind of reconciliation.

But here's what I want you to imagine: imagine that the leaders of North Korea and the leaders of South Korea publicly confessed their own sin, their own wrong, their own prejudices, their own false propaganda. And they confessed it to God and said, "God we are wrong in these areas – this is sin; would You forgive us?"

They say nothing about the other side, just about themselves. And then to each other, they say, "I have wronged you. I have lived in such a way as to create tension and terror and fear and separation. Will you forgive me?" And then the nations of North Korea and South Korea together publicly forgive one another.

Do you think that might help? Do you think it might bring about some kind of reconciliation? Well of course it's an unrealistic image. You say, "that's impossible."

If the Israelis and Palestinians were to go the same thing, do you think that might bring about some resolve?

You see this is not just a good idea or a fantasy or a concept; this is truth. And truth is objective; truth doesn't change with opinions about it. We may have opinions about truth; we may not like truth; we may deny truth, but if it is truth, it remains truth. You may be ignorant of truth, but if it is truth, it remains truth.

If I am driving my car out on the freeway and I run out of gas and I am strung on the side of the highway, so I call the CAA and they come and the CAA gentleman gets out of his vehicle and he says to me, "Um, what is your philosophy of motorcars? What do you think is important about motorcars?"

You say, "Well, you know, I always think that it's important that you change the oil regularly."

"Okay, great." So they change the oil.

And then somebody else comes to see what is going on and say, "Hey, what's your philosophy of motorcars?"

"Well, I think sparking plugs, you know, are crucial and I think you always need to have good sparking plugs."

"Okay, let's change the sparking plugs."

Somebody else comes along and says, "No, good tires are what a car needs."

And somebody else comes along and says, "Hey, the problem with this car is that it's the wrong color. You need to paint it purple and it will be much better if you paint it purple."

The truth is, of course, it has run out of gas. And nothing else matters if there is no gas in the tank.

And you see if we have become separated from God, if that is the true diagnosis of the human condition as opposed to simply a religious nonsense idea; if this is the truth about humanity, then we can fiddle around changing the color of the car, we can fiddle around putting some fresh sparking plugs in it.

But unless there is gas in the tank, unless God is back into the human experience, back into human life, unless the Spirit of God has imparted His own life, as we saw last time in the early part of Ephesians 2 when he says, "you were dead; you were made alive with Christ. Not *by* Christ, though He was the One who did it, but *with* Christ. It is Christ Himself who makes you alive by His presence – it's His life.

Now, having been reconciled to God (the string back in the beads), what you discover: you are being reconciled to one another. That's why the gospel is not a nice thing we should just be talking about in isolation; it's why we are concerned about as a church in our city, that we have actually an answer to the fundamental needs of the human heart.

And our job is not to worry about the sparking plugs – they're needed and other people will do that; our job is to get gas back in the tank, the Spirit of God back into human experience.

And that in itself becomes the means by which we are reconciled. If you see it this way: have a triangle and at the apex of the triangle you have God and one side you have one person or group – the Jew, the Gentile, whatever, and the other side the other.

How are these two sides going to get closer to each other? There's only one way and that's by getting closer to God. And as they get closer to God, you become closer to each other. The closer you are to God, the closer you become to one another.

Well, forget about North and South Korea – I just knew you wouldn't object to that illustration – but what about our marriages? Now that's getting a bit close to the quick isn't it? What about the things that divide us as husbands and wives?

I don't do a lot of counselling in these areas – it's not my area of expertise – and if somebody comes to talk to me, I send them to Warwick Cooper usually.

But people do come to talk to me. And you know sometimes a lady will say to me, "Can I come and see you?" And she comes to see me and she tells me about her marriage and about her husband. She tells me the things that are wrong in the marriage.

And when she is finished, I think to myself, "That husband of yours; he is a jerk. Why in the world did you marry him in the first place? I have absolutely no sympathy for him or empathy."

So I give him a call and I say, "Would you like to come in? I would like to chat with you one day." And he comes to see me.

And I say, "So, your marriage is in great difficulty."

"Yeah."

"What's the problem?"

And he tells me. And at the end of it, I think man, that woman pulled the wool over my eyes. She is such a ...I won't use the word. Why in the world did you marry a woman like that?

And I say, "Well, let me talk to you both at the same time." And then the story is always different, always different.

"But I thought you said this about?"

"I didn't mean it like the way you understood I thought you thought..."

You know, and it gets – it's somewhere in the middle.

Wouldn't it be interesting if a guy contacted me and said, "I would like to come talk to you because my marriage is in difficulty" and he comes and says, "Look, let me tell you what the problem is. I am ..." And I think to myself, "Yeah, you are a jerk, you really are. Man, I don't know why she ever married you."

And then I talk to his wife and she comes in and says, "Well, you know, the real problem is me." And she tells me all about herself and what she has done and why he finds it difficult to live with her.

And I say, "My, you are messed up aren't you?"

Do you know something? You could start to get somewhere that way. You could start to get somewhere that way. When you start with the fact the problem is me.

That's why Paul brings it back in this passage. He brings it back to the blood of Christ and to the cross of Christ. What is that all about? It's all about the only grounds on which you ever approach the cross of Christ. It's the grounds of your own sin and your own mess and your own failure.

Of course in a marriage your husband and wife contribute to it, but that's their business to sort that out.

And when you come to God in confession you can only do so in a spirit of humility. Now when you start a debate with each other, it is always in the spirit of self-justification. "Well you said, and I did, and you said...37 years ago you said." And you cough it all up.

"You remember it that long?"

"Of course I remember; it hurt me so badly. I could tell you the date."

"Well you deserved it; that's why I said it. It's true."

You know, but if I – I am the problem. And when Paul takes this back to the cross, he is always going back to the fact that I, as that old spiritual says,

*It's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord
Standing in the need of prayer.*

Not

*It's her, it's her, it's her, O Lord,
Deal with her.*

Or

*It's him, it's him, it's him, O Lord,
Beyond the pale.*

No, it's me; it's me.

When I was at school we had a woodwork teacher. He wasn't very nice and you could do these things in those days – they were legal – if you got into trouble (and I did occasionally), he used to get hold of your hair just by your ear. And he would twist it; it's very painful. And he would say, "You are a stupid boy. What are you?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You are a stupid boy. What are you?"

"I'm a stupid boy, sir."

They used to do that in my day. I'm not that old, but they used to do it.

And you stood in front of the class and said, "I am a stupid boy."

You got the sympathy of everybody else. Mind you, half of them would say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah we knew already."

But there comes a time when you stand and you say, "Lord Jesus, I am a stupid boy. It's me."

And so, having been reconciled to You, and I go back into my real life and real world and I find there's all kinds of tensions, whether it's my marriage or my family or my in-laws or my workplace or whatever it may be, my siblings. They may well have messed up. Of course they may well have damaged you, of course they may well have treated you badly.

That isn't where you start; you start, "It's me."

And then, having come, as he says,

“In Christ you who were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

His purpose is:

“In this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.”

And then you go down to the last verse:

“In him you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

We come to the cross to confess and be forgiven and cleansed, but that isn't the end of the story, just getting cleaned up. It's that then the Holy Spirit in us unites us together to one another.

You see when you meet a Christian you often feel a spiritual oneness with them though you may know very little about them but you feel that oneness you share in common in the Spirit.

Now it's possible of course that as a Christian there is unconfessed sin and you are grieving the Spirit and you don't feel that same oneness, you don't feel that unity. We have to keep getting right with God.

If our relationship with God is the most important thing in our lives, getting gas in the tank, then our relationships with other and the immediate circle of our family, the wider circle of our community and church and city and nation and world is going to be an outworking when we live in humility, not self-justified, in dependence.

And we discover that the string is back in the beads and they begin to not only relate but together they have got a meaning, an identity and a purpose they never have when they are on their own.

So Paul's message in this chapter is be reconciled to God and out of that, on the basis of that, you can be and you need to be reconciled with those around.

Faced with the dilemma of disunity, which our fallen world leaves us with by nature, there is the dynamic of unity, which is the outworking of the gospel and the closest and tightest relationships in our church here or the churches we are part of.

Our unity is not just we all agree about the same things; our unity is in Christ where we live a clean, humble dependent life. And out of that we are made one. And the barriers have broken down, the dividing walls are removed and the hostility is replaced by love.

Does that make sense? If it doesn't, we have wasted the morning. But if it does, we may need to go home and do something, and rebuild the most precious thing in our lives, which are our relationships.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank You this morning that Your Word doesn't put our head into the clouds and detach us from life. It puts our feet on the ground that we live realistically with all the traumas and failures that are part of our own lives and part of other people's lives that impact us and influence us.

Lord, we pray that we will be men and women who walk humbly with our God, who confess our sin, who know that we are forgiven and right with You, who live in the fullness of Your Holy Spirit, and we enrich and not drain the people we are with.

We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen.