



This Is Us

Ephesians 2:11-22

Week 4 | Jan 28, 2018

Summary: *The Cross creates Church.* That's the essence of the teaching in Ephesians 2. Paul makes the transition from the first half of the chapter to the second with the word "therefore." In other words, what follows is the first consequence of salvation by grace. Once God makes you alive individually, he immediately brings you into the plurality of his family. Put another way, the salvation of humanity is the creation of a new humanity, comprised of every nation, tribe, people, and language redefining themselves in relation to Christ and each other. This is us. We are the **Body Politic**, united under Christ's headship as citizens of his kingdom and coheirs of his blessings. We are a **Peace Institute**, studying, promoting, and embodying the shalom of God. And we are a **Construction Site**, very much a work in progress, as we are "being built together to become a dwelling" for God. Not that he doesn't live in us already, but he surely does not yet live in us as fully as he could. One way we might come to contain more of him is by embodying on earth more of the diversity that delights his heart in heaven.

Discussion:

1. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. What inspires you most about this vision of the church?
2. The only command in Ephesians 1—3 is "remember." Paul challenges us to remember the distance, the alienation and exclusion, that was our plight prior to knowing Christ. Can you literally remember that? Do you know by experience what Paul is talking about here? Tell your story.
3. Our union with King Jesus makes us a *body politic* here on earth. Elsewhere in Scripture we're called "citizens of heaven" (Phil. 3:20), "Christ's ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5:20), and a "holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). How comfortable are you with these biblical, political terms? How do you manage the tensions inherent in being citizens of both heaven and earth?
4. As a *peace institute*, we study, promote, and embody the shalom of God. As a church, how do you think we are doing collectively on this front? How could we do better?
5. John Piper said there are two obstacles to Christ-honoring diversity in the church. One: there are those who don't particularly want it or enjoy it. Two: the diversity promoters will be opposed when they try to help things along. Let's talk openly: Do you see the first obstacle in your own heart? Have you ever experienced the second obstacle? Have you been persecuted for this? What's one thing you could do to become a promoter?
6. Finally, we said the church is a *construction site*, messy and in process. How patient are you feeling toward the church and its leadership these days? Where would you like to see their energies directed? And what about you: what is God building in you? Where are you under construction?

Isn't this just the Social Gospel?

As some of us at Willowdale have tried to encourage racial harmony and diversity, we've certainly run into both of the obstacles that John Piper spoke about. And probably the most common push-back we've heard has involved the term *social gospel*. "Isn't this just the social gospel?" some people have asked. Others haven't asked, but have asserted confidently, "*This is just the social gospel!*"

If you've heard this, we want you to be equipped to respond.

First, what Willowdale is encouraging is not the Social Gospel. The accusation is baseless.

The term, "Social Gospel" arose in the early twentieth century when fundamentalists and liberals began to divide (which was also when good news and good works became bifurcated). The fundamentalists just wanted to preach a message of personal salvation. Premillennial dispensationalism was growing, and two World Wars and the Great Depression had a lot of people thinking about the Apocalypse and dreaming of a rapture out of this mess. So fundamentalists turned away from good works and just tried to get souls saved with the good news. You could say they held onto Ephesians 2:8-9, but lopped off verse 10.

Meanwhile, theological liberals promoted their post-millennial dreams of ushering in Christ's reign by building God's kingdom on earth. They downplayed the core doctrines of the faith—the authority of Scripture, the atoning sacrifice of Christ, his literal resurrection, and personal salvation by grace through faith in him—and focused almost exclusively on social change. Liberals gave themselves to good works, and advanced many important causes. But their gospel became social change. They grabbed onto Ephesians 2:10, but forgot verses 8-9. Social change—whether poverty alleviation, racial harmony, better schools, child labor laws, whatever—became their message. To them, social change was the sum total of what Jesus taught.

This clearly is not what Willowdale is about. We have never moved an inch off the true gospel message. We believe in and preach Ephesians 2:8-10, John 3:16, Acts 4:12, Romans 3:21-26, 1 Peter 3:18—and the rest of God's holy, authoritative Word. We say regularly that there is a real heaven and real hell, and that real people go there, depending solely on whether or not they have a relationship with Christ.

But we don't think that good news and good works should be separated. They are to be held together. So we preach Christ and alleviate poverty. We preach Christ and stop human trafficking. We preach Christ and feed the hungry. We preach Christ and promote diversity. In fact, about the same time we embarked on our journey toward racial harmony and diversity, we baptized more people than at any other time in our history. So the notion that we've suddenly gone liberal or adopted "the social gospel" is uninformed, and were we to debate or adjudicate it, we'd win hands down.

But a second thing to say in response to this accusation is: "What aspect of Christ's gospel isn't social?" The gospel reconciles sinners to God—that's social! The gospel brings us into God's family—that's social! The gospel declares us *righteous* in Christ and calls us to work for *justice* and *righteousness* in the name of Christ, which are thoroughly social, relational terms.

At its heart, the gospel forges peace in place of strife and turns mortal enemies into family. It does that for us and God, and us with each other. The gospel is social from start to finish.

Anyone who sees the gospel as thoroughly private and individualistic, or who denies its social implications, is the person with a sub-biblical view. But that's not Willowdale Chapel—praise be to God!

