

One of the biggest challenges we face in our country and our communities are the cultural differences ... getting along with and showing respect for people of other cultures.

This isn't a new challenge. The Apostle Paul had personal, first-hand experience with it. Paul was a Roman citizen who also happened to be Jewish. His mother was Greek, so he was Gentile. His father was from the tribe of Benjamin, so he was also Jewish. Back then, the biggest controversy in the church was how Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians could get along.

Today's lesson comes from the letter Paul wrote from a Roman prison to his congregation at Ephesus on the Mediterranean coast of what is present-day Turkey. It was intended to help the Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians see each other in a different way.

The Jewish Christians thought: *"For 1,500 years God held us accountable to the law he gave us through Moses. We might be too far away from the temple to worship or make sacrifices there, but all people should still avoid eating and touching what God told us to not to eat or touch. All males should be circumcised. Everyone should observe the Sabbath and the Passover. These are the things that separate us Jews from every other culture."*

The Gentile Christians thought: *"Oh, there they go again. Same old thing. Those Jews think they're better than everybody else with their rules and regulations. That's why they insist we should follow their strange customs. They want nothing to do with us. And we feel the same way about them."*

So, where does the truth lie? You heard it in our lesson: **But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** Christ Jesus and his blood changes everything. That applies to you as well. That's why you'll want to remember this double truth: **Jesus Changes Our Status and Jesus Changes Our Lives.**

There was some truth in what the Jewish Christians said. Let me explain. For 1,500 years God did hold his people accountable to the laws he gave them through Moses. But not anymore.

- All the OT laws on government, which neither Jew nor Gentile kept perfectly: Christ Jesus eliminated by having himself sentenced to death under those governmental laws.
- All the OT laws about the ceremonies, festivals and sacrifices, which again neither Jew nor Gentile kept perfectly: Christ Jesus did away with when he himself was the sacrifice.
- And all the OT laws on morality ... the 10 Commandments ... which none of us has kept: Christ Jesus took all of our sins on himself when he shed his own blood on the cross.

God brought both Jew and Gentile near him through the blood Jesus shed on the cross. He didn't want one without the other. So, he sent Jesus. Jesus died for both. Jesus rose for both.

Here's even more proof of that. Remember when Jesus died and the sun went dark, the earth shook, and the rocks split? There was also a 30' x 30' curtain in the temple that tore in two from top to bottom. No longer was anything separating anyone from God. Jewish followers of Christ and Gentile followers of Christ both had the same access to God. Jesus changed everything, hence today's double truth: *Jesus Changes Our Status and Jesus Changes Our Lives.*

(1) Most of the Christians in the congregation in Ephesus were Gentiles, that's anyone and everyone who isn't a Jew. Paul's Epistle reflects his target audience: **Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people (the Jews) and also members of God's household.**

The *"consequently"* refers back to Jesus' death and resurrection; the events described just prior to our verses. Before those events, the Gentiles were foreigners and strangers: both to God's people, and to God himself. That should hit home hard since none of us are Jewish. We're all Gentiles.

That means you were a stranger to God's family. Being a stranger is uncomfortable, isn't it? Remember that feeling when you met your spouse's relatives for the first time? You were nervous. You felt like you didn't belong. You were on your best

behavior. You knew they would be judging you, and maybe not in a good way.

That's the same way the Jews felt about us non-Sabbath observing, non-sacrificing offering, pork-eating Gentiles. We were strangers to God's family.

And we were also foreigners to God. Being a foreigner can be scary. You're in a place you've never been. You don't know where you're going. Everyone is speaking a language you can't understand. Even if they aren't talking about you, you're still paranoid they are.

That's the situation you were in with God. Your sins earned you more than a feeling of being paranoid. Your sins earned you the reality of hell. You were a foreigner to God.

What changed? On Good Friday and Easter Jesus Changed Your Status! **You're no longer a stranger. You're a member of God's household** ... just like your spouses' family is to you. You're relaxed around them. You're comfortable. You belong. You are family.

That's the way it is in God's family, too. You're relaxed. You're comfortable. You belong. You are family with your fellow believers. When Jesus perfectly kept the OT Law and buried it in his tomb, he brought Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians together.

As far as God is concerned, **you're no longer a foreigner. You're a fellow citizen with God's people.** It's like being back in the States after a long trip away. You're back home. You recognize his language and understand his customs.

(2) Jesus hasn't only changed our status, he's changed our lives since you are 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.

We are so blessed to gather in this beautiful church! We treasure value every inch of it! From the hundreds and hundreds of tongue-and-groove ceiling boards, to the 55,000 roof tiles up top, and the 100,000 bricks that form the walls. This is a special place to worship our Savior.

The Jewish people treasured their 30' by 90' temple. (As a reference, one side of our pews is 20' by 60'.) The temple roof was 30' high. (The peak of our church is 45'.) The entire interior of temple was covered in gold. The walls: gold! The ceiling: gold! The floor: gold! The Ark of the Covenant: gold! All the items in the temple: gold! But, unless you were a priest, you never got to step foot inside the temple.

What a dramatic contrast to Christ's NT Church, which isn't a church we attend. It's who and what we are! **You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.** What God inspired the OT prophets and NT apostles to write down forms an indestructible foundation.

On the foundation of God's Word is **Christ Jesus, he chief cornerstone.** Each wall and every brick in that wall (that's us), we take our direction from him. Christ is the stone that counts. Without him the whole building collapses.

And get this: **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.** You and I are a temple. Our hearts are a dwelling in which God the Holy Spirit lives! God lives in us by faith.

We also live in God. Only a chosen few could enter God's presence in the OT temple. We enter God's presence every time we step into this sanctuary. Where 2 or 3 gather together, he's here! Jesus Changes Our Lives.

If what God inspired the OT prophets and the NT apostles to write is our foundation, then we need to make sure we're serious about exploring them and relying on them.

- Read your Bible ... daily isn't too much.
- Study the Scriptures ... weekly Bible Study anyone?
- Get to God's House ... regularly means as often as you can.

Jesus Changed Your Status: from stranger and foreigner ... to family member and fellow citizen. Jesus Changed Your Life: you are a temple in which God lives.

Isn't that a message we want to hear ... every week? Isn't that a message we want to cherish ... every day?