

INTRODUCTION

Praise the Lord that I have this privilege to serve the Lord together with you in this church. Thank you for making the transition of myself and my family a whole lot easier. I am not sure if any of you still remember the message Pastor Ron Roy preached one month ago. Does anyone still remember the most important thing we need to do in this transitional period of our church? Yes, it is prayer. We need to pray for one another and I need your prayer too. I was thankful to see brothers and sisters come at 8:30 this morning to pray together. I knew many of you prayed for me at home too. I encourage you to pray every Sunday before you leave home. The same Sunday when Pastor Roy was here Pastor Yau invited my family and a few brothers and sisters to lunch. He stressed that FCBC is a big family. I responded by saying that: "I am grateful that FCBC adopts my family into yours." We were outsiders but now we become part of FCBC.

In Paul's writings, he used the concept of adoption to illustrate how a person becomes a member of God's family. The word "adopt" appears in Ephesians 1:5. When a person is saved he/she not only becomes a Christian, he/she is also adopted as a child of God. This is a great blessing to the Ephesian believers because most of them were non-Jewish people, or so called Gentiles. The idea of becoming children of the God whom Jewish Christians worshiped was something new to them. When we come to chapter 2 of the book Paul further elaborates on the concept of entering into the family of God. God's plan is to bring Jewish and Gentile Christians into the same community. FCBC is also a big community. We have people coming from different background. When I first came here I was surprised to see so many Cantonese folks. We also have brothers and sisters whose mother tongue is Mandarin. Then we have the second and third generations of early immigrants who speak English. God also blesses our church with some American brothers and sisters. We call you foreigners, but in fact we Chinese folks are the true foreigners in this country. God's heart is to bring us into the same family just like He saved both the Jews and the Gentiles. God's desire is to attain unity out of our diversity.

EXPLANATION

1. Isolation 隔離 (v. 11-12)

God saves us by changing our spiritual status completely. Paul told the Ephesian believers that before they knew Christ they were isolated from God. Look with me in **verse 11**: 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). A Gentile becomes a Gentile by birth. Notice how the Jews look at the Gentiles. The Jews labeled the Gentiles as "uncircumcised." Circumcision is the removal of the foreskin from a male's reproductive organ on the eighth day after he is born. It symbolizes that this baby is now in God's covenant. Jewish people are very proud of the fact that they are God's chosen people. Some of you may remember when David fought against Goliath he despised Goliath as an uncircumcised person.

Paul stated that not only were the Gentiles isolated from God because they did not have an outside sign of circumcision they were also isolated from God on the inside. He says in **verse 12**: 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. Paul mentioned five aspects that the Gentiles were isolated from God. I list them on the slide. (1) They “were separate from Christ,” meaning that they were outside of the blessing of the Messiah (Savior) promised in the Old Testament. (2) They were “excluded from citizenship in Israel” because by blood Gentiles were not Israelites. (3) They were also “foreigners to the covenants of the promise.” Since God’s covenant was first made through Abraham to his future generations of Jews, Gentiles had no part in it. (4) As a result of the first three criteria Paul added that Gentiles were “without hope” because they did not have any relationship with God. Their only hope was in the things of this life. (5) In sum, the Gentiles were pitiful because they were “without God.” They might worship other gods but they did not know the only true God.

Gentiles were isolated from God. Very often when we look at people we focus on how others differ from us. I am from Hong Kong and I can tell you that we are very discriminative. We have a name for people coming from the mainland, but we forget that most of our parents and grandparents are also from China. At one time there was an influx of Vietnamese refugees and we created a title for them. We even tease our own peers! We call those who wear glasses “four-eyed creatures.” We may have certain degree of pride about our background or upbringing, but we have nothing to boast about before the righteous God. We were isolated from Him before we knew Christ. We do not choose to believe in Jesus, it is God who chooses to save us. It is all because of His grace! We should always be grateful to God. But even when we do not discriminate against others we may still be victims of discrimination. Recent events happened in Virginia can happen anywhere. People in your work place, school or neighborhood may not like you because of your skin color or because you cannot speak perfect English. How should we deal with that? What matters is not how others look at you, but how God sees you. If Jesus Christ is your Lord then you are a beloved child of God. God loves you enough to send Jesus to die on the cross for your sins. It is God who affirms our value.

2. Integration 連結 (v. 13-18)

In this passage Paul tells us that God’s desire is to attain unity out of our diversity. Before we knew Christ we were isolated from God. Then comes the wonderful news. God took initiative to integrate us into one body. Paul tells us in **verse 13**: But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. In the past we were isolated from God, “but now” in Christ we are integrated into God’s family through the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul continues to explain the meaning behind this integration. Listen to **verses 14 and 15**: 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 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. From verse 14 to 17 there are two words with contrasting meanings that are repeated. They are peace and hostility. From the Greek word for peace we derive the English name Irene. I don’t know if there is any Irene in our midst. If not, then it may be a good name to consider for your future baby daughter. Christ brought us peace by removing hostility. Paul explain that the hostility is between Jews and Gentiles because the Old Testament Law was an invisible obstacle dividing

the two groups of people. The Law was only given to the Jews to instruct them how to worship God and how to conduct their lives in the society. Gentiles did not have to follow the Jewish Law. A few weeks ago my wife passed her U.S. citizenship exam. I have not received any notice from the immigration about when my interview will be scheduled. I jokingly said that in the past our marriage was between a Hong Kong boy and a Taiwanese girl. Now it is between a Hong Kong guy and an American lady. If the government needs someone to serve jury duty it will go after her, not me because that particular law does not apply to me. By the same token Gentiles did not have to obey the Jewish Law. When Jesus came He fulfilled the requirements of the Law by suffering death penalty for men's failure to obey the Law perfectly. In doing so, Christ set all people free from the Law. As a result, the barrier between Christians of Jew and Gentile origins had been removed. Besides the hostility between the two groups of people, there is a more serious hostility that Christ dealt with. **Verse 16** reads: and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. This hostility is between the whole mankind and God. We may think that when we do not know God we are only being neutral to Him. However, the Bible clearly tells us that those who are not with God are against Him. Paul says in **Colossians 1:21** that: Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. Through the cross God reconciled with sinners and thus removed His hostility toward men. The end result of God's salvation is described in **verse 18** of the Ephesians passage: For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Whether Jews or Gentiles, whoever in Christ can come to God the Father. Jesus Christ has become a bridge that crosses over the pit of sin and connects men to God. In Christ we have been integrated into God's family. Jesus not only achieved peace for us, He also calls us to be messengers of peace. Still remember the "Irene?" Are you an "Irene" in the church, work place or your home? Are you a peace-maker or a peace-breaker? Are you actively spreading peace and help integrating people who do not know Christ into God's family? On any given Friday or Sunday there will be newcomers in our church. You can play the role of an "Irene" and welcome them by a simple hand-shake or chat. May our church be filled with many "Irenes."

3. Institution 群體 (v. 19-22)

God's desire is to attain unity out of our diversity. Without Christ we are isolated from God, but in Christ we are integrated to God's family. By integrating Jews and Gentiles, God did an amazing thing by creating a new institution. That is the most exciting part in Paul's message. Let us revisit one section in **verse 15**: ...His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two... What is this "one new man" Paul talks about? If you get this, then you can grasp the core message in the whole book of Ephesians. This "new man" is the church. But Paul was not talking about a church building, or a localized church like the Ephesian church. It is about the universal church of Jesus Christ, which consists of believers throughout the human history. All the Jewish and Gentile Christians are part of this institution. Being integrated into this institution is just the beginning of God's work, for He wants us to continue to grow in this institution. How? Listen to **verses 20 and 21**: 20 Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. This institution has to be built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. By "apostles" it refers to the twelve disciples of Jesus, together with Paul, who were called by Jesus to preach the gospel and to establish the church. As for the "prophets," whether understood as the Old Testament prophets or the prophets in the early church, wrote

down the messages they received from God that became the Bible we read today. Besides the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Paul said that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of this institution. At that time when people built a house they first laid down a cornerstone at a corner of the foundation, and it will become the reference point for other foundation stones and the walls to be built. If the cornerstone is not set properly then the whole building will be out of shape. I am a frugal person by nature. Once I bought a can opener from a dollar store, but it fell apart soon after I put it to use. To this date my wife still blames me for spending a buck to get a junk. Another time I bought a spirit level. It has a bubble in the middle and some marks on the two sides to indicate if a certain point is perfectly horizontal. I had no idea why I bought that ruler because it was defective from the get-go. The bubble tilted to one side! What if I used that level ruler as my tool to build a house? It would be like the Tower of Pisa in Italy. Fellow coworkers: what kind of foundation and cornerstone do you use to build this church? Brothers and sisters: what do you use to build your life? We live in a time where everything goes as long as you like it. But if do not use the Bible as our foundation and Jesus Christ as our cornerstone then we are building Towers of Pisa. Whatever God says that must be our final answer. For anything outside the scope of the Bible we can keep an open mind and a humble heart to listen to each other until we come to a consensus. Paul also reminded us that the church is God's holy temple. Only when we are connected as one institution to Christ then we can stay holy because we are prone to sin. That is an important reason about why we do not just attend church meetings, we have to join a church. Though we can read the Bible by ourselves or listen to any message on the internet at home God never asks us to be a lone ranger Christian. Instead, God places each of us in this institution for us to build up one other, pray for each other, serve together and laugh and cry together. Don't go to a church only to enjoy its programs and facilities. If your kids only come home when it is dinner time it is called a restaurant. If your kids only come home when they need money it is called an ATM. If you choose to make this place your spiritual home praise the Lord. If the Lord leads you to another church praise Him too. But no matter which church you go to I challenge you to be a part of it. Use the gifts and talents God has given you to serve others. Care and pray for those who are in need. Reach out to people and bring them into this institution so that they too can become family members.

CONCLUSION

God's desire is to attain unity out of our diversity. In Christ we are one body. It is understandable that for a church like FCBC we have to work hard to maintain unity. We have people who speak three different languages. We also come from various background. If we do not rely on our Lord then we are just a church with 150 or so individuals. But in Christ we are one church. Our church has past struggles, and we all have our own baggage. But in Christ every day is a new beginning. A story was told that a church underwent renovation. One day the workmen were supposed to install windows of different colors. There were blue ones, red ones, etc. When the workers rolled in the glass someone slipped and all the windows were completely shattered. When the people were about to dump the little pieces into the trash bin the foreman walked into. He saw the mess and thought for a moment. Then he asked the workmen to save the fragments. This wise leader spent the next few months to weave the broken pieces together as beautiful artwork that depicted stories in the Bible. God is doing the same thing in His church. Every one of us by ourselves is only an ordinary fragment. But in God's mighty hand He puts us together as His masterpiece.