

If I were to use one word to describe to you the guts of the letter to the Ephesians, it would be the word, “Purpose”. So much of this letter is about identity. It’s coming to the understanding of “Who are we? – Where’s **our** place, in the whole scheme of God?”... What’s **my** place in the church, where do we fit with Jesus Christ, and what’s the overall purpose????

Sometimes advertisers expect us to believe the must unbelievable before & after pictures, hey??? – you know where a 40 pound weakling buys the latest ab-buster and 6 weeks later, he looks like the 98kilo runner-up for Mr Universe.... Or a buck-toothed, flabby, 60 year old grandmother buys the latest Chong-Yow moose-extract powder, sprinkles it on her favourite snack, and 12 weeks later, it’s flattened her tummy, smoothed her wrinkles, straightened her teeth, it’s taken the frown off her face, and she’s transformed into a 23-year-old honey that makes your jaw drop.... We’ve all seen the before-and-afters, and we don’t really believe them, do we????

Well, Paul gives us a little glimpse of who we are, and he does it by giving us a before and after picture, and it’s a very honest picture. Because *with Christ, there is a very real difference between the “before” ... and “after” ... The difference is extraordinary...*

With Christianity, we have no hope of understanding our purpose, or finding out who we **are**, unless we first look back, and remember what we have **been**. It’s only in the light of what we have **been**, that we can ever begin to grasp, the enormity of the change that’s taken place.

You see, if I try to answer the question “Who am I? – What’s my purpose?”, well that’s a very self-centred question, isn’t it???? But when we compare the before picture with the after picture, it becomes a very Christ-centred matter... Because we’ve got the before, and then we’ve got the after, but Christ is right there at the centre of the change

So, let’s have a look at the before and after pictures.

A couple of weeks ago, I shared with you that, at one time, relationship with God was strictly reserved for the people of Israel – for God’s chosen people. And their relationship, was very much, defined by the Law... And the purpose of the Law, was to make an unclean people, worthy to be in the presence of a Holy God...

So, unless one was a Jew, and one was keeping the Law, it was hopeless. And Paul is brutally honest about this. He says: ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. That’s pretty cutting, isn’t it? He basically says, we **were** god forsaken and good for nothing – excluded.... No matter how highly you might think of yourself, without God, we’re God-forsaken and good-for-nothing...

That just flies in the face of most of today’s humanistic teaching, which we also find in much of the church... It’s all about trying to build up somebody’s self-esteem... Paul wasn’t very good at that, was he???? If only we could all see

ourselves as we really are, man-o-man, that would go a long way towards getting rid of our sinful pride, wouldn't it?...

I was God-forsaken... **I was** good for nothing... **I was** a stranger. **I was** separated from Christ. **I was** alienated from God's promise... **I was**.... without hope and without God....

That's the before picture. What a depressing state of affairs... But something's changed!!.... At the cross, everything changes. And when I come to the cross, that's when the change is activated in me. ...

And the after picture kicks in. It reveals, who we are **now**. ...**now in Christ Jesus** (alright, it's not self-centred – it's centred in Christ) **now in Christ Jesus** we who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ...

What an incredible difference Christ makes, hey??? Without Christ, we would still be God-forsaken. Without Christ, there would still be no hope. Without Christ, there'd be no chance at all, of having any relationship with God..... But **with** Christ, all that changes.

And it's not just pleasant thoughts about Christ – it's the **blood** of Christ. Christ shed His blood, for the forgiveness of sins... Let's never forget that... To our shame, sometimes we do forget, just how much we have to be thankful for. And if you ever find yourself losing your joy in Christ, look back, and remember what you were before Christ... God-forsaken, and without hope.... What a change, there is in Christ...

So, what is this change in status, that comes in Christ?.. Well, a key word here, is “peace”...

One time when we were in Brisbane, I saw a poster stuck under a bridge, and it was promoting some socialist organisation. And it said something that made no sense at all. “Fight for peace.....” Fight for peace? Of course I knew what they were trying to say. They were trying to say “Stand up for no more war.” But it just really struck me, the oddity of the sign, “Fight for peace.”

Peace is something that nearly everybody longs for. And so here we find something that is just so tantalising.... Christ is our peace....

Usually we think of Jesus Christ as making peace, or proclaiming peaceⁱ, but here we find that He is peace. What does that mean? Well, the only peace that lasts, comes through the Prince of Peace. *The US or Egypt may broker a deal between Hamas & Israel, but how long does it last? ... About 6 hours...* There will be no lasting peace in Palestine, until every knee bows before the Prince of Peace.

If a married couple who are bitter with each other, come to me for advice, well I could give them a few pointers – a few tools to help them to communicate better.... But it’s not going to bring any lasting peace to their marriage... To bring peace requires a change of heart, and God is the only one able to change a heart.... It’s only when Husband and Wife yield themselves to Christ, that peace can ever have a hope of getting a go-on in their marriage....

Christ is the central figure, through whom reconciliation occurs. And it occurs in two directions. It occurs vertically,

and it occurs horizontally. It occurs horizontally within the church reconciling us to each other. And it occurs vertically, reconciling all of us together with God. It's only through Christ that we are reconciled to God. And it's only through Christ that we are reconciled with each other. And so Jesus Christ **is** our peace. If we have any peace at all, it's only because of Christ.

This was his **purpose**. This is why Jesus died on the cross for us – to make peace between each other and to make peace with God. And so, in the church, age old walls and barriers between each other are smashed to pieces. And the age old wall between humanity and God himself is obliterated. It means that we can be reconciled to each other, and we can be reconciled to God.

Following W W II, the victors of Europe, divided their territories. In 1949, the city of Berlin (the capital of Germany) was divided in 2. West Berlin became part of the American and western backed West Germany, and East Berlin became part of the soviet-backed communist Germany. And thus, began the era of the Iron Curtain, which would endure, for the 46 years of the cold war (although you'd think, looking at today's recent events in the Ukraine, that the cold War's still going)...

Some of you younger ones, may be blissfully unaware of the Iron Curtain, and what that meant... Over night, the city was split down the middle. The country of Germany was split, and it became 2 different countries... And not only that – these two different countries, had completely different political and ideological values – communism vs. capitalism..... Families

on one side of the city, were cut off from families on the other side of the city.

Bibles were printed in West Germany, and they were burned in the East Germany. Christians had the freedom to preach in the west, and in the East, they were sent to 're-education' camps, ... and many were never heard from again... People used to risk death, to attempt to cross the border from East to West... and hundreds (if not thousands) died, attempting exactly that... They would risk the land-mines, the barbed wire, the electrified fences, the machine-gun posts, just to try and cross the border, to a better life on the other side...

On the 13th August, 1961, construction began on the Berlin wall.... Those on the East, were confined to the East... And the Berlin wall, symbolised the strength, and the impenetrable barrier, that was the Iron Curtain.... I remember as a boy, hearing stories of brave Christians who smuggled bibles across the Iron Curtain, to see that the word of God was available for believers to read in the Soviet-held territories....

It was a dividing wall, that cut the East off from the West....

And Paul describes to us, a dividing wall, which once cut us off from God. And it was a dividing wall, that cut us off, from God's chosen people... The law was the barrier. The unachievable law, was the barrier.

Thursday night, as I flew from Sydney to Moree on a Dash 8, I got talking to the lady next to me. And we talked about the 10 commandments, and how important they are for giving moral guidance... But I said, what's the pass mark???? I can't do it. Is 50% a pass? If I keep 5 of the commandments, is that OK? Or maybe 7???? James 2:10 tells me that if I'm really

good at keeping the whole law, but mess up just once, “bzzz” fail... Because of sin, I can’t keep the whole law... Because of sin, I am as cut off from God, as East Berlin was cut off from West Berlin.

Can anyone remember the date 9th November, 1989ⁱⁱ? I couldn’t. I had to look it up. That was the date that the Berlin wall fell. And if you saw those images on TV, you’ll probably never forget them...

A solid, defining barrier wall, dividing east from west, being smashed to pieces with sledge hammers, fists, and clawing fingers. Some of you may even have a small piece of it, sitting on your mantle piece at home. 100,000 people, gathered in the city square, chanting 4 words - "The wall is gone! The wall is gone! The wall is gone!"ⁱⁱⁱ

And in Christ, “The wall is gone”. In the church, God bridges age old differences. And nothing is too hard for him. If God can reconcile us to Him, he can certainly reconcile us to each other. In the church, He brings all things together in unity in Christ. And so the stocky can be reconciled to the sod buster. The townie can be reconciled to the bushy. The black man can be reconciled to the white; The criminal to the victim; The Hatfield and the McCoy... The Montague and Capulet..... In His church, a unity happens. Goodness, we can even love Volvo drivers....

These are all brought together, and we are all one in Christ. The Palestinian and the Israeli. The Jew and the German. Even the property committee and the youth group. Through Christ, we all have access to the Father by the **one** Spirit. He has **destroyed** the barrier. He has **destroyed** the dividing wall of hostility. This was **His purpose**. If

hostilities and disunity still exist in the church, it's because we are working against the purposes of God. Christ's purpose was to destroy, everything that keeps us apart.

So, our before picture is without God, without hope, and with hostility toward one another. And when we look back – that's how we were. But Ephesians is about finding our identity now. We know what we were. But what are we now? And so we look forward, and we see the after picture.

Now that Christ has reconciled us, we are no longer excluded. Far from being foreigners, we are now fellow citizens with God's people. *And when you talk to somebody who has emigrated to Australia, their citizenship means so very much to them. It means that, although they're a newcomer, they belong. It means that, although they're a newcomer, they're at home. It means that, although they're a newcomer, they have the privileged rights of a citizen, the same as you and I (it makes no difference whether you've been a citizen for 50 years, or if you've been a citizen for 50 minutes – there is no difference – we have the same rights).* And so we who were far off are now fellow citizens with God's people. We are members of his household. And we are being built together as one unit.

This week, I've been away at an "Oxygen" conference. It was a place for pastors and church leaders, to breath deep, to be fed the word of God... And we had some great speakers – it was a great week.

And the conference was held in the old Redfern railway workshop (they've done it up into a conference centre)... Enormous sheds... Enormous machinery... I was right in my

element.... If I ever drifted off, I'd just study the amazing construction of the whole complex...

And what I noticed, was this was no "kit shed" you bought off the shelf, screwed together, and then thought about later, what you were going to put inside of it...,

The whole thing, was purpose-built. The machinery was incorporated into the very structure of the building... Right from its very beginnings, its foundations were designed and built, to have every following component, built into this magnificent structure...

The foundations, the pillars, the trusses that made up the gantry system – the gantry crane itself, was all part of the building....

And this is a brilliant example for me, of how Paul is telling us, that Christ builds His church... There's no afterthoughts...

We are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Jesus, himself is the chief cornerstone, and in Him all the building is fitted and framed together – it's all one integral unit..... Christ is integral to the building. What we believe, is integral to the building – alright, the Apostles and the Prophets are the foundation – the Apostles and the Prophets are the ones who teach us about God, so what we believer's important, and we are all built together, in Christ, for God's purpose. Rising to become one building, in which God lives.

This is who we are..... Each one of God's children, are essential for God's purpose. That's our identity..... and yet this identity is only because we are in Christ.

You know, in this passage, I find one of the most amazing concepts. Each of **us** are essential elements of the building. Why should that amaze me? Well, it amazes me because God didn't just choose us for our sake. We weren't saved just for us. We were saved for Him, and we were saved for the rest of the church. We were saved for God's purposes. We were saved for the work we will do. We were saved because in us, He chooses to reside. We are all built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. Now I find that incredible....

And he hasn't finished. His work is continuing. God lives in an imperfect and incomplete building. Do you get this??? The church, is an incomplete and imperfect building... and yet God chooses to live in it...

Have you ever tried living in a house while it's still being built? Have you ever lived in a house through renovations? It's not very easy is it?

The year before the wool industry went bust, Dad and I built a brand new shearing shed – good timing hey? We planned and plotted, and its construction became a major project. And we used it before we finished it. Many of the floor planks were un-nailed. The mesh fence was just strung up loosely with wire. There were gaps. The walls weren't complete. The floors were unsanded and splintery. It was tough. (Velcro) But you know what? We could have stayed in the old shed. But we didn't. We chose the unfinished building because we wanted to.

And that's what God's like with us. The church is imperfect. We've got our splinters. We've got our gaps. We're rough around the edges; we rub each other the wrong way. Sometimes I think we're more trouble than we're worth. But you know what? God **chooses** to live in us – why? Because he wants to. He lives in us and builds us and He renovates us as He goes.

So we find our identity in Christ. Your identity **is** in Christ, but your identity **is not** an individual identity. Our identity is as a part of the whole building. And this is a building that God is building. Christ as the cornerstone. The Apostles & Prophets as the foundation. And us together, are God's work....

And so we may well ask the question “Who am **I**? What's **my** purpose?”. But that's the wrong question (very self-centred). The correct question is “Who are **we**? What's **our** purpose?”. Because your purpose and destiny is tied, not only to Christ, but to your brother and Sister in Christ. That's the way God's designed it, and that's why Christ is our peace – not just vertically (between us and God) but horizontally (between one another).

We are God's building.... That's our purpose. And over the next few weeks in Ephesians, we'll be discovering more about how we live out that purpose. But that's a topic for another day. Together – In unity, we are God's dwelling place, built in Christ.

Amen

ⁱ Pillar NT Commentary Peter O'Brien (p.194)

ⁱⁱ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/mycentury/transcript/wk35d5.shtml>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ron Hutchcraft in www.holwick.com