**As Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians, he did so wanting to address several situations that existed within the congregation at Ephesus. As Paul was carried along by the Holy Spirit to pen this letter, he did so addressing issues that existed and painting a picture as to what the body of Christ looks like.**

**Our text today addresses two primary issues that infected many of the 1st century congregations, and unfortunately, they are two things that still infect the body of Christ. These two issues flow out of humanity’s sinful nature and pride, and unfortunately, many used God’s Word to justify these two infections, many used God’s law to justify the existence of these two things among God’s people. What were the two infections, legalism and bigotry.**

***Please turn to Ephesians 2:11-22***

**God’s Law might be the most misunderstood and misused thing in all of Christianity today. Especially when it comes to understanding the Law in light of the promise of God to Abraham and what Christ has accomplished through His life, death and resurrection.**

**In the Bible there are three types of God’s Law. There are three purposes of God’s Law,**

**and there are three functions of God’s Law.**

**Why is the “what, the why and the how of the Law important - because without understanding the What, the Why and the How of God’s Law, we will never truly understand the freedom that the saving Gospel of Christ brings.**

**“The What”**

**There are three primary dimensions or types of Law in the Bible.**

* + - 1. **Civil**
      2. **Ceremonial**
      3. **Moral**

**“The Why”**

**There are three primary purposes of why the Law was given by God.**

* + - 1. **To reveal God’s holiness and, in turn, reveal the sinfulness of humanity (our need for salvation (Galatian 3:19-25, Romans 7:1-12).**
      2. **To reveal Jesus the Messiah and His salvation and, in turn, eradicate any type of “works righteousness” mindset in the hearts and minds of God’s people (Hebrews 10:1-10).**
      3. **To protect your neighbor from yourself; act as a tutor/guardian (Exodus 23:9, Gal. 3:24).**

**“Lastly the How”**

**There are three primary functions of the Law**

* + - 1. **Curbing or restraining evil (external, Romans 13:1-5).**
      2. **To act as a mirror, so that we can see ourselves as God sees us, as we truly are (internal Hebrews 4:12).**
      3. **For the believer; to be our gentle teacher in the freedom of Christ’s victory (2 Tim. 3:16).**

**For us today, the purpose of WHY the law was given is directly connected with our text. The Pharisees and Sadducees believed and taught that God’s Law, the Torah, was given as a way to be reconciled to God.**

**The Law was NEVER meant to save or reconcile us to God, EVER!!**

**And adhering to the Law can never make you more righteous before God, it is only Christ’s righteousness that can do that.**

**Romans 3:21-22 (ESV) But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:**

**… meaning, Christ has provided freedom through His salvation and therefore legalism and bigotry should be eradicated and destroyed in the body of Christ because they are contrary to the body of Christ.**

**1. Once we all were lost.**

**Ephesians 2:11-12 (ESV)**

**Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 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. *(Please remember Eph. 2:1.)***

**Ephesians 2:11-12 (NLT)**

**Don’t forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called “uncircumcised heathens” by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.**

**Please don’t take this to mean that anyone who wasn’t Jewish could not be saved prior to Christ.**

**Isaiah 45:22 (ESV)**

**“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!**

**For I am God, and there is no other.**

**Many non-Jewish persons became part of the covenant promises of God, Ruth and Hagar are perfect examples of this reality. But now, there is a new covenant in Christ Jesus and it is for the entire world!**

**Circumcision identified you with God’s covenant promise given to Abraham, Baptism is now the sacrament that identifies you in the new covenant of Christ Jesus** *(Colossians 2:11-12).*

**We must always remember that the salvation of the Messiah was promised *TO AND THROUGH* the nation of Israel, but it was always a salvation that God promised to the entire world.**

**Isaiah 42:6-7 (ESV)**

**“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;**

**I will take you by the hand and keep you;**

**I will give you as a covenant for the people,**

**a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind,**

**to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,**

**from the prison those who sit in darkness.**

**Isaiah 11:10 (ESV)**

**In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.**

**But as the apostle Paul addresses non-Jewish persons who were saved through Christ’s salvation, he reminds them that they were once lost and alone and now have found a home. All this is from God and because of what Christ accomplished through His life, death and resurrection.**

**Study Question:**

* 1. **How does Ephesians 2:1-2 have a direct connection to 2:12-13?**

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**2. In Christ, now we have been found.**

**Ephesians 2:13-18 (ESV) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.**

**These passages directly address two areas that contradict the Gospel and the freedom that Christ has provided through His life, death and resurrection. These two issues have plagued most of the congregations in the first century and, unfortunately, it continues to plague the Christian Church today. The two infections/issues that Paul seeks to address and illuminate are, legalism and bigotry.**

**There was (and still exists) a misconception about the Law of God. It is something that the Pharisees and Sadducees taught; that a person could be saved through adherence to the Law of God. However, the Bible, the Law was never given to the people of Israel to save them. The Law could never, and can never reconcile or save anyone, ever (Gal. 2:21)!**

**Paul states this in Galatians 3:17-18, This is what I am trying to say: The promise God made with Abraham could not be canceled 430 years later when God gave the law to Moses. God would be breaking his promise. For if the inheritance could be received by keeping the law, then it would not be the result of accepting God’s promise. But God graciously gave it to Abraham as a promise.**

**The Law was given/added… (Galatians 3:19-25)**

* 1. **To reveal and expose our true sinful nature and thus simultaneously revealing the holiness of God. God’s Law reveals His perfect will (3:19).**
  2. **To eradicate (destroy) any type of “Works Righteousness” mindset (3:21-22). To reveal that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, ALONE!**
  3. **To serve as a temporary guardian/tutor until Christ’s salvation is revealed, always pointing God’s people to the promised Messiah (3:24).**

**The idea that was perpetuated and accepted by many was salvation was by Jesus and….. *(circumcision/adherence to the Law).* The other sinful infection that Paul sought to eradicate is bigotry.**

**One theologian said this…**

**He stated, that *“Legalism breeds and gives birth to bigotry.”* An interesting thought…**

**Israel had become infected with a judgmental superiority complex that did not, and does not reflect the love and mercy of God revealed in Christ Jesus. It absolutely contradicts the Triune God’s nature and it certainly does NOT reflect the grace and mercy revealed through Christ and His ministry to provide salvation.**

**Because of the legalistic tendencies of Israel, they became infected with a superiority complex that unfortunately existed within many of the congregations in the 1st century Church. It directly affected their unity and their fellowship.**

**No-one could, nor can, be saved by or through the Law of God *(Psalm 51:17, Ephesians 2:1-10, Romans 2:20, 3:21-25)*.**

**No one is better or more deserving of God’s grace, ALL have sinned and fallen short of God’s perfect will (Romans 2:10-18, 3:21-23).**

**None of us EVER have the right to be judgmental/legalistic or allow ANY type of bigotry to exist or dwell within our heart.**

**Through Christ’s life, death and resurrection, He has reconciled those who place their trust in Him as Lord and Savior to the Father. He has also torn down the dividing wall between all peoples, all races, and all social statuses.**

**Paul reminds us that ALL have sinned and fallen short of God’s perfect will. The Law** *(internal function #2)***, should work humility in our heart and begin the process of destroying all legalism and bigotry that exists within our hearts and mind.**

**Jesus has built a Church that is based on salvation by grace through faith ALONE in Him, and He desires His church to be free from any and all legalism and bigotry, a unified body of believers proclaiming the saving Gospel of Christ with and without words.**

**Study Question:**

* 1. **How can legalism and bigotry affect a congregation’s unity?**
  2. **What can we do here at Hope Lutheran Church to combat legalism and bigotry.**

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**3. What our new temporary, spiritual home looks like.**

**Ephesians 2:19-22 (ESV) So then you (all) are no longer strangers and aliens, but you (all) are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you (all) also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.**

**So what does it look like to be a part of this new creation in Christ Jesus?**

**That this congregation, Hope Lutheran Church, would be a place where the Holy Spirit of God would dwell richly as we proclaim, rest, trust and grow in the saving Gospel of Christ Jesus according to the Father’s will in the power of the Holy Spirit.**

**…That we would be a congregation devoted to the saving Gospel of Christ, allowing the Holy Spirit to knit us together and mold us into the people God longs for us to become.**

**….That Hope Lutheran Church would be a place that is void of all legalism and void of all bigotry.**

**As my kids would often ask as we are on a way to a destination, “Are we there yet”**

**And the answer is no.**

**The saving Gospel of Christ has made a way of salvation to any and all who place their trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior,**

**Jesus has also provided everything this congregation needs to be free in Him,**

**The Father has given us the Holy Spirit to unify us in a wonderful and extraordinary way.**

**What We Take Away:**

1. **Legalism and bigotry are forms of pride that contradict the freedom Christ has provided through His life, death and resurrection.**
2. **Jesus has torn down the walls that divide us, may we embrace and walk in that new reality!**
3. **Our new temporary spiritual reality should reflect Christ’s unifying covenant love as we grow together in maturity and the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior!**

**May we all desire and pray for a congregation that is resting in, and proclaiming, the completed victory of Christ Jesus, allowing the Holy Spirit to shape us and mold us into a mature congregation that is free of all legalism and free of all bigotry.**

**May this be our prayer and our most sincere desire.**

**Study Question:**

**A. Discuss why the “Take Aways” are so important to God and why they should be important to us.**