

Ephesians 2:11-22

Week 4

4/11/21

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. Quick word about Easter last week (post recap video). (Every Sunday is Resurrection Sunday) Sup.

Ephesians 2:11-22. PRAY.

Last week on Easter we looked at Ephesians 2:1-10. And we talked briefly about how before Christ we were disobedient, dead, and doomed. But in Ephesians 2:4 we read these great two words - **“BUT GOD...”**. Because of His mercy, His love, His grace - even when we were dead, made us alive together with Christ Jesus.

That though we were enemies of God, we have been reconciled to Him. We have been brought back into a relationship with Him.

Well today, in the second half of Ephesians 2, Paul's going to tell us that our reconciliation to God was not the only reconciliation that happened in the cross of Christ. Through His life, death, and resurrection - Christ not only made us right with God, He also makes us right with each other. Not only are we adopted sons and daughters of God, we also become brothers and sisters with one another. We are made into a family.

Here's why this matters for us today - we live in a world built on division. All around us in both big ways and small ways, as well as our own sin nature, tempt us to live with an **us vs. them mentality**.

Falcons. I remember living out a silly example of this a few years ago. I grew up a lifelong San Francisco 49ers football fan, but once Lindsay and I knew we were moving to Charlotte, I wanted to start rooting for the Panthers. I had some trouble getting behind the team though because a guy named Cam Newton was the QB, and I very much did not like Cam Newton, mostly because of when he played for Auburn in 2010. So I was talking to a good friend of mine who is a die hard Panthers fan and telling him my predicament and he said to me - “Hey Tim, if you want to become a Panthers fan, don't start by rooting for the Panthers, start by rooting against the Falcons. (if you weren't aware they are big time rivals). If you learn to hate our common enemy, your love for the team will grow.”

And that's a silly example but this mentality around division, tribalism - it touches every aspect of our culture - sports for sure, but also politics, religion, views on covid 19 and vaccinations, schooling debates, etc. etc. **And we bring these divisions into the church.**

- Masks vs. no masks or Vaccine vs. no vaccine.
- Democrat vs Republican.
- He said/she said gossip and slander.
- We talk negatively about one another, criticize, tear down instead of build up.

As we'll see this morning, in the church at Ephesus 2,000 years ago there was division as well. Specifically, the divide was between two groups: Jews and Gentiles, or non-Jews.

- It was a **religious** divide: The Gentiles were not a part of the family of God in the original Mosaic covenant.
- It was a **cultural** divide: The Jews had rituals, feasts, and ceremonies that distinguished them from these other nations.
- It was a **racial** divide: The Jews could boast of being in the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Yet through Christ Pauls says these two opposing groups, these two enemies, have become **family**.

The gospel is good news for their unity, and as we'll see today it is good news for our unity. Good news that in the gospel we don't have to live in division or separation as the people of God. **That we are made into a family through the blood of Jesus.** In fact, Christ has already done the work of breaking down what Paul calls **"the dividing wall of hostility."**

It is now our charge to learn to live in light of what Christ has already done for us.

So here's where I want to go this evening :

1. I want us to work through the passage and look at what Christ has done to reconcile us together.
2. And then I want to address what I think are two common enemies to us living into the unity that is already ours within the church through Christ.

Passage Walkthrough:

11 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—

Pause there. So Ephesus at that time was a Greek city that would have had a pretty large Jewish population. So within this church there would have been a pretty good mix of Gentiles and Jews. But Paul here is directly speaking to the Gentiles within the church.

He says remember that you Gentiles (which here just means - nations or foreigners) were at one time called "the uncircumcision".

Now we talked about this a few weeks ago, but circumcision was a physical sign given to the Israelites, the OT people of God way back in **Genesis 17**. That it would be a physical marker that they were the people of God.

So Paul says to all of the non-Jewish people within this church - remember that at one point you were not a part of the covenant people of God. He continues:

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.

This is a pretty dire situation. They were separated from Christ. They were separated from the people of God. And they were hopeless and Godless.

This is true of all of us apart from Christ. Apart from the saving work of Christ we have no hope (like we talked about in week 2), we are separated from God and we are separated from each other. Division + hostility are the default. The situation is bleak.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

There's a new classification of folks - no longer Jew + Gentile. It's all who are **"In Christ Jesus"**. That's how all of us - Jew and Gentile, black and white, rich and poor - all of us who are brought near to God and to each other are brought near **"IN CHRIST JESUS."**

[Key verse in this section] **14 For he himself is our peace,**

It's the term "Eirene", the NT equivalent of the Old Testament word "Shalom". It means not just absence of conflict but wholeness, flourishing, rest. Christ has not just brought us **neutral** with God, remember - we are sons and daughters of Him. Christ has also not just brought us **neutral** with each other - we are now brothers and sisters in Christ. We are a family. You can't just tolerate people you go to church with, that's not the goal.

who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

There are three relationships outlined in the Scriptures where the Bible says that two people, or two groups become one. The **first**, you might know is the relationship between a husband and a wife. **Second**, as we've been talking about for several weeks now is Christ and His people. The third is one we might not often think of - and that is Christians with one another. Two groups, now one.

Instead of hostility - Christ has brought peace.

Instead of division - Christ has brought unity.

Instead of two groups, "us and them" - **Christ has made us one.**

15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in 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.

Christ has done away, he's abolished, in other words - fulfilled and annulled the law of commandments. What does that mean? It means in Christ the old way of entering and staying in the people of God - through lineage, through sacrifices, through rituals and religious systems, has been done away with and the new means of reconciliation to God is (verse 16) - **the cross**. One new man, one new people, one new family instead of the two → **through the cross**.

The cross levels the playing field. The cross makes the two one. The cross bridges the divides we want to create amongst ourselves. The cross makes a way for us to love those different than us. The cross makes a way for us to love our enemies. The cross makes a way for us to forgive as we have been forgiven.

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

If you remember back to our sermon on Acts 15, the Jerusalem council - one of the key evidences for early Jewish believers that Christ had died to save both Jew and Gentile is the fact that Gentiles were receiving the Holy Spirit. That God was pouring out His Spirit not only on the Jewish people, but also on Ethiopians, Greeks, Romans, and the like.

And the text says here - We both have access in **one Spirit** to God. There's not a unique access to God for this group of Christians but not this one. One Spirit.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

I love the juxtaposition of this passage. The text says:

- You were strangers and aliens - now you're citizens in God's Kingdom.
- You were outside the family - now you're members of the household of God.

- You were, as Gentiles, barred from the temple (they couldn't enter into the places of worship) and the presence of God - now you're a stone and part of the living temple, where God will dwell with His people.

TRANSITION → **This is what Christ has done for both Jew and Gentile.** This is what Christ has done for the people of God. Through His life, death, and resurrection we are, by faith, reconciled to God **AND** reconciled to each other. This is final. This is not a maybe thing. This has happened.

I love the wording of verse 14 → **Christ has made us both one.** It is accomplished. Done. Signed, sealed, delivered.

So the challenge for us in the church is not to make unity happen, but to learn how to live in light of the unity that is already ours in Christ Jesus.

To actually live out what is already true about us - that we are unified, we are one, we are family *in Christ Jesus*.

Application

So what I want to do for the rest of our time together is give you a warning about two enemies to our unity within the church.

There are many more enemies to our unity (gossip - 3 weeks. Forgiveness - 5 weeks), we'll address some more later on in the book, I just have time to hit 2 that I think are important in light of where we're at as a church and in light of this passage.

1. Enemy #1: Individualism

In our western, secular culture we are confronted all the time with the lie of rugged individualism. That the highest ideal is that we maintain being a free, autonomous individual. No one can tell me what to do. No one should put unnecessary boundaries on me. Anything or anyone that goes against what I want or what I feel is not just wrong, but harmful, dangerous, and oppressive. We see this in alarming ways with things like cancel culture and unhealthy uses of boundaries. We're told to move past or get rid of anyone in our lives who holds us back, who tries to change us, who doesn't help us get ahead or let us be our "true selves".

And this idea of the autonomous self is plaguing Christianity. Individualism can kill our unity from the inside out because the Church then becomes, like the rest of my life, about me. We view it through the lens of questions like - am I being fed, is this meeting my needs, do I feel connected, do I feel like I belong?

Now none of those questions by themselves are harmful, but what's harmful is the posture less of - what can I contribute? What can I bring? How can I help God get the glory since, as we'll see next week, that's actually what the Church is about - God's fame and renown in the whole world.

But what happens is as we begin to live with this mindset of - it's all about me - which begins to create in us no desire to commit to a family of believers, no desire to sacrifice for the good and growth of other Christians. No desire to stay the course even when it gets relationally difficult and other sinners hurt us. We only know how to bail.

Here's how Joseph Hellerman puts it in his fantastic book *When The Church Was a Family*. (If you're new around here and wonder what we are aiming for when we say we want to be a family, read this book.)

"They call it radical individualism. What this amounts to is simple enough. We in America have been socialized to believe that our own dreams, goals, and personal fulfillment ought to take precedence over the well-being of any

group—our church or our family, for example—to which we belong. The immediate needs of the individual are more important than the long-term health of the group. So we leave and withdraw, rather than stay and grow up, when the going gets rough in the church or in the home.”

We've said this before, and we're going to say it again and again - **The Bible has no category for a lone ranger Christian.** The New Testament assumes every Christian who is a part of the global Church, will live that out in the context of a local church body.

We show we are part of the universal Church by identifying with a tangible people locally.

To put it in the language of this passage, to be a Christian and not belong to a local church body is to say:

- “I want to be a stone apart from a building.”
- “I want to be a son or daughter separated from my family.”
- “I want to be a citizen separated from my kingdom or nation.”

None of those things are good

One of the reasons why we put so much emphasis on church membership here - talk about it, push for it - is because that is our way of saying “I'm in. I'm committing to this family. I'm committing to this local expression of the family of God through thick or thin, I'm in.”

So we practice it, we talk about it, we celebrate it. Everyone who becomes a member here signs a membership covenant, where we're all agreeing to 7 commitments together as a church, our guidelines for living as a family. Just like your biological family has guidelines, goals, rhythms - so does our church family. So we ask everyone to agree to those and we hold each other accountable to living those out. We think this matters. Those who stay, those who commit to a local church body - **grow.**

I think how this gets most of us is, because most of us in this room are members, is not through not becoming members, but failing to continue to practice the things we committed to each other. To show up with presence, to keep being available, to keep loving, to keep forgiving.

Is it hard? Yes, absolutely. Does it come with friction? Yes, absolutely. **But it's also a beautiful, tangible grace gift from God for our sanctification and maturity to have to learn how to be family with other saved sinners.**

Hellerman continues...

“Long-term interpersonal relationships are the crucible of genuine progress in the Christian life. People who stay also grow. People who leave do not grow. We all know people who are consumed with spiritual wanderlust. But we never get to know them very well because they cannot seem to stay put. They move along from church to church, ever searching for a congregation that will better satisfy their felt needs. Like trees repeatedly transplanted from soil to soil, these spiritual nomads fail to put down roots and seldom experience lasting and fruitful growth in their Christian lives.”

SUMMARY:

A posture that says - my life is about me, church is about me, my relationship with Jesus is only about me - kills the unity purchased by the blood of Jesus.

And so we must go back to the gospel - this good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus - as the fuel by which we push back against our apathy, our laziness, our self-protection, our pride, our misordered priorities and instead learn to live into the difficult but beautiful unity bought for us through the blood of Christ.

2. Enemy #2: Counterfeit Reconciliation

I went back and forth with what to call this one. I think you could name it “false unity” or “posturing unity” or “shallow unity”. It’s a desire for unity or reconciliation in the Church apart from the sacrifice of Jesus.

Honestly, if I can go here this morning, the way I see this play itself out the most is in our conversations and work towards racial reconciliation. I want to be really clear here, with everything I’m about to say I’m primarily addressing racial unity within the church.

Let me explain:

The hostility between Jews and Gentiles, both inside and outside the church, was palpable, deep rooted, and fierce. One Jewish writer writing around the time of Jesus talks about how some Jewish fathers, if their daughter would marry a Gentile man, that instead of throwing a wedding feast + party, they would host a funeral. They would gather people together to publicly announce - this daughter is now dead to me. I don’t know how you get more hostile or divided than that.

And Paul says to them - **2:14 - Christ Himself is our peace**. He destroys the religious hostility, the cultural hostility, the racial hostility, all of it between these two ethnic groups that have so much trouble and so much history (thousands of years) of not getting along. **That what Christ did to unite them is stronger than anything that could divide them.**

Listen, I don’t care what your political leanings are, I don’t care what you think the root underlying issues are - **I don’t think any of us can deny that we have hostility, or at the very least tension, between ethnic and racial groups within our country and that that can and has bled into the church.**

That is not how it should be in the world, but that is especially not how it should be within the church! And I think 99% of this room would agree. Yep! Racial harmony, racial unity, racial reconciliation are good things. I love that I don’t have to convince most of our church of that. But it’s when we get into the outworking that things can get a little hazy.

TWO GROUPS:

I remember hearing a friend of mine preach on Ephesians 2 a few years ago in the wake of much that was happening back in 2017 and 2018. He is a black pastor who spent most of his life in a predominantly white church context, but for the last 7 or so years has been pastoring a primarily black church in an inner-city context. I liked what he said, so I called him and asked him this week, and he told me I could use it:

He said in the sermon that there are two primary groups (or camps) he sees when it comes to how to approach racial injustice or division as the church within the church. He says both groups have parts that are good and parts that are not.

Group 1 - “Shouldn’t we just preach the gospel?” Camp

These are the people who might say things like - “We have a sin problem, not a race problem.” They’re not indifferent to the problems of race, they just think if we make the main thing the main thing - preach the gospel, it’ll fix it.

You’ll hear other things from this group like - “Just because it’s a big topic on the news doesn’t mean it needs to be a big topic in our churches. We need to preach the gospel, tell people about Jesus. That’s our mission as a church and we need to stick to that. The race stuff will sort itself out as people learn to follow Jesus.”

Group 2 - “Fight like the world” Camp

It's a group that desires to fight for reconciliation and justice but have no Biblical basis for the fight. This is a hot topic, so we should address it, post about it, preach about it, talk about it. For lack of a better phrasing - it's the "racial reconciliation is trendy" camp. You might even hear things like - "Forget about the gospel, this is just a basic human dignity thing."

He says there's a **subgroup** within this group that looks something like - "I really want to be thought of as caring about this, or I don't want to get cancelled if I say the wrong thing or don't say anything, so I'll tweet and post or repost things on my social media so people think (or know) I care about these things I'm told to care about." Everybody else is saying this, I should too.

Listen, both of these groups are partially right, and both are partially wrong.

SPEAK TO CAMP #2:

If you find yourself in or pulled towards the "fight like the world" camp, Ephesians 2 tells us → **There is no racial reconciliation without the gospel.**

Racial unity within the church is not something we conjure up on our own. Every system we try under man's strength will fail. Our driving motivations, if not the gospel of Christ, will not last. And the world doesn't get that. Often the church doesn't get that.

If we step into this as a church, if you step into this as a believer, and you don't have a deep awareness of the way the gospel motivates and accomplishes this, it's never going to create in your life or in our church the necessary fuel for the long haul.

If we're driven into this work by social media and news media which change every 5 minutes, once the world is on to a new thing, so are we. **There's no deep rooted Biblical conviction or gospel fuel for how to play the long game of reconciliation.** To take the necessary steps to endure for the long haul.

Ant + Farmer's Market. Preach at churches. "Man, I'm so convicted. Tell me what to do." We do a farmer's market. This coming Sunday 1-3pm. 7 days from now, come to that. 20% of people would come.

I asked him why that was and he said, because Tim - Feeling bad + social pressure doesn't work. You need something that predates the news cycle. You need a sacrifice 2,000 years ago, blood that was shed to make the two one.

That's why Ephesians 2:14 is so crucial - **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.**

God's Kingdom is one of all tribes, tongues, races, people unified together. **But to fight for racial unity in diversity without the blood of Christ is to try to bring in a Kingdom without the King.**

We want the unity of all these different people offered us in God's Kingdom, but in order to get there we must surrender to the King who died to make it possible. Christ is our peace. Not simply new systems and structures, not simply new policies and procedures, not simply open dialogues and conversations. **CHRIST.**

SPEAK TO CAMP #1:

There is no racial reconciliation without the gospel....but [But to the "let's just preach the gospel camp" let me say this] **and there is no gospel without racial reconciliation.**

How can I say that? Because of God's design and desire from the very beginning. A people, not just a whole bunch of individuals, a **people** for Himself from all nations....from **Genesis 17** where He promises Abraham that through him He'd

bles all nations to **Revelation 7**, the throne room of God where people from every tribe, tongue, and nation are proclaiming - **“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”**

This was God’s plan from the beginning, it’s part of His mission now through the Church, and it is what He is leading us towards for all eternity.

Which means we preach the gospel, we address the depths of sin that lead to racism. Yes, absolutely. But there’s some tangible action that also has to happen and some necessary steps to outwork the gospel into this area of the church and this area of their lives.

You don’t do this with any other area of sin, right? If someone has an addiction to alcohol you don’t just say - “well, that’s a sin issue so we just need to keep preaching the gospel and that’ll fix it.” No, you also get them into counseling or a 12-step, have them change some aspects of their lives that put them in environments to fail - you do some tangible things while preaching the gospel to their sin, shame, and guilt, family of origin. **Why would racial reconciliation be different?**

We are called to do a deep work towards what Christ died for - deep, true, lasting reconciliation and unity between all who follow Christ - between races, ethnicities, and people groups. We do this through humbling ourselves, listening to different perspectives, putting ourselves into situations where we can be the minority, seeking diverse friendships and relationships. All of it driven and fueled and motivated and accomplished by the work of Jesus.

Communion and Close

We need Christ. It is Christ that breaks down the wall of hostility. It is Christ that makes the two one. It is Christ Himself who is our peace. And Christ’s work on the cross, His blood that was shed which reconciles us to God and to one another.

Christ is building His Church. Uniting us in Him to God and to one another. No more two groups, no more us vs them, no more “well they’re different from me.” One. We are one.

COMMUNION - “On the night He was betrayed....”

- Individualism
- Racial Division