



The Gospel Family
Ephesians 2:11-22

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“The Gospel Family”

The 4th Sermon in a series on the Epistle to the Ephesians entitled
“The Gospel Life”

This is God’s Word from Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 11 through 22.

*¹¹Therefore 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— ¹²remember 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. ¹³**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 ¹⁵by 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, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

Father in heaven, your word is life to us. We need you to speak to us today and teach us from your word. Be with us now. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction: “Switching Sides”

So I want to talk about rivalry, particularly in sports. In this area, it seems like there are two main rivalries that get talked about: Steelers-Ravens, mostly because of our proximity to Baltimore and Dave Dorst's unrelenting parade of Steelers gear. The other rivalry is the Washington Redskins vs. just about anyone from the NFC East, particularly the Dallas Cowboys. These rivalries can get pretty heated, and the trash-talk that flies around is particularly brutal. But I don't want to talk so much about the rivalries themselves, but the players that end up playing on both sides of the rivalry at one point or another. Especially in really nasty rivalries, I wonder what it's like for these professional football players to have to switch sides. You used to hate this one team, everything about your year builds up to these rivalry games, and then suddenly you're on the other side. Imagine walking into the locker room the first time after switching sides. Talk about awkward. These are people that you've said terrible things about. And now you have to face them. And to top it all off, you're being asked to lay down your body and sacrifice for a group of guys that used to be your arch nemeses. How do you tear down these old walls that separated you and end up as one team? That's the problem that the Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles had when they came into this newfangled thing called the church. Paul addresses all of this in this passage. This is part 2 of his treatise on the Gospel. Remember, this passage comes hot on the heels of last week's passage. Paul has just finished talking about how both Jews and Gentiles needed salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As Dr. Silvernail said last week, Paul took them from the deepest depths to the highest peaks to show them what Christ has done for them. And he has called them to live according to this new identity. Not surprisingly, Paul thinks that we understand things better when we have concrete examples, and so Paul unpacks how the Gospel that he just finished talking about impacts our interpersonal relationships. He dealt with the vertical, our reconciliation with God, and now he's addressing the horizontal, our problems with each other.

To help guide us, we're going to be using Paul's structure, which just so happens to mirror last week's passage structure. In verses 11-12, we get a picture of what you, meaning Gentiles, once were. Then in verses 13-18, we see what Christ has done to reunite us. And finally in verses 19-22, we find out what we are now and what we are becoming.

So let's jump right in.

V. 11-12: What you once were

¹¹Therefore 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— ¹²remember 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.

Here Paul is talking about what you once were. "Remember that **at one time** you Gentiles..." Paul wanted the Gentiles to remember where they came from, the depths of darkness. And so this is where Paul talks about the walls, the rivalry hate if you will, between Jews and Gentiles. He wants to talk about the brokenness between people, the disunity and hostility. So as we take a closer look at the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, what's interesting is that the division isn't racial. To be sure it generally ran along those lines, but the division is actually spiritual and moral. The dividing line that put separated "us" and the dreaded "them" was whether or not you had the sign of the covenant. Verse 11 is Paul's acknowledgement that the Gentiles were called names by the Jews. To call someone the "Uncircumcision" or a "Gentile" was to essentially use what we would consider a "racial slur" today. It carried so much more than just an identifier. It communicated hostility and contempt. John Stott noted in his commentary that the hostility that Jews had for Gentiles was remarkable. Jews absolutely hated Gentiles. Another theologian William Barclay said that there was an immense contempt for the Gentile. Jews believed that Gentiles were

created for the sole purpose of fueling the fires of Hell. If a Jewish man or woman married a Gentile, the Jewish family would conduct a funeral...for the Jew getting married.¹ The division was absolute.

Most of us haven't encountered that kind of hate directed toward us, but think about it. If we had lived in the 1st century ancient near east, almost every one of us would have been labeled a Gentile and treated as such. This is religious and spiritual elitism or snobbery at its worst. But Paul continues with the bad news. In verse 12, Paul seems to pile on. Gentiles were without Christ, without a people or state, and they had no promise to hang on to. Gentiles, and we with them, were savior-less, stateless, friendless and Godless. They had no one and nothing to cling to, and so Paul rightfully says that they had no hope and were without God in the world. It's a pretty bleak picture. That's what sin does. It poisons literally every single one of our connections. We don't have a right relationship with God. We don't have a right relationship with the Creation, and we don't have a right relationship with each other.

But thankfully Paul continues on. He doesn't leave us there because Christ was not content to leave us there, wallowing in our misery, without hope or God. No, after a bleak picture Paul again gives us hope with two little words. Last week, it was "But God" in verse 4, and this week it is "But now". You once were, fill in the blank, friendless, stateless, helpless, godless. But now, you are none of those things.

Vs. 13-18: What Christ has done

¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by 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, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Christ has brought those who were far off, the ones that were outcasts and rejects, he's brought them near. I was lucky to have this passage because it was the passage we went over at the Middle School and High School Modgnik's this year. We hear good and convicting words there, so I'm going to shamelessly adapt some of what the speaker, a church planter by the name of Duane Davis, told us. If I picked you way in the back left and you down here in the front right to be a Gentile and a Jew, we would see the great distance, the great number of barriers or walls between them. But if I were to then say, hey, you're one with me, come hold my hand, or better yet, give me a hug, they both would have to stand up, walk down, and they'd end up at the same place. They'd end up at me. Sure one walked further, and one walked less, but they end up in the same place. And what happened to the distance between them? It's shrunk down, and if they are holding onto me, then they are connected to each other too in a way that they weren't before. And that's how this unity works. As we are united with Christ, we are united with all those who are also united to Christ.

But it all hinges on the person calling both sides to him, the one that unites them. Thankfully it's not me. It's Jesus that does this. In this way Jesus is our peace. He is the one that creates peace between those united to him. But peace isn't create simply by drawing both groups near to Christ. Even if he calls them to himself, there're still barriers and distinctions that form hierarchies which produce contempt and hatred. So Christ has to do something about the walls, and so he does. He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility in verse 14.

Well, that begs the question, "What's this dividing wall of hostility?" A lot of theologians would say that the dividing wall Paul has in mind is the physical wall in the temple building that separated the court of the Gentiles from the rest of the Temple. Back in the 1st century, and really dating back to the Tabernacle and all the temples since then, Gentiles were physically barred from entering the

¹ Stott, Ephesians, 91.

sacred, holy space. And so in this sense, Christ is destroying the need for that wall. With his death and resurrection, he reminds everyone that no one comes to the Father except through him. Everyone is in the same boat.

While, I think that sense is certainly present, but I think it's better to think of the dividing wall as the Law. Remember that the "law of commandments expressed in ordinances" in verse 15 refers to the ceremonial law and the dietary restrictions that set apart Jews from Gentiles. Those restrictions and customs were the source of the Jews' haughty spiritual elitism. It was because of those restrictions and customs that the Gentiles were not allowed in. The Law was the foundational reason for the separation and distinction. So, if that law and those ordinances are abolished, what distinguishes Jew from Gentile? Nothing! Since Christ came and fulfilled the Law completely by living the perfect life without sin and paying for the sins of His people on the cross, everything is fulfilled, nothing is left to do. It is that righteous life and humble death that abolishes its requirements not because they are not good, but because they're done and complete. And so instead of **two** groups: Jews and Gentiles, you have **one** new one: Christians.

Great, we're getting someplace, but we're not quite there yet. So we've been brought near, and the dividing wall has been broken down and there's supposed to be peace. But Christ is not content to stop there. Why do we get verse 16? What's left? Well, the old hostility is left. To revisit our opening illustration, you can be part of the team, but you're not a part of the brotherhood or the family. You're still regarded as a second-class citizen. But Christ does not want Jews to grudgingly tolerate Gentiles in His Kingdom. He wants them to be one, in every respect. And so we get this verse on reconciliation to God.

What does "reconciling us both to God in one body through the cross" **do**? Well, we end up having to realize that Paul puts Jew and Gentile alike in the same boat. They both desperately need salvation. If we backtrack to Ephesians 2:3, both of them were "*living in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*" Paul was putting an end to the spiritual elitism and snobbery of the Jews because he said: You both need to be reconciled to God. What's more is that since both are reconciled to the Father in **ONE** body, the Jews can't even say that they didn't need as much salvation as the Gentiles. For all of their uppityness and all of the shade they threw at the Gentiles for being outside of the covenant, the Jews need **the exact same salvation** as the people that they think are worse than the scum of the earth. It's really hard to be elitist, snobby, and self-righteous when you realize that you're right in the same boat. Your sin doesn't put you in a better position than theirs does. And their sin doesn't condemn them any more than yours condemns you. And so the hostility dies. Verses 17 and 18 highlight this oneness in need. We both need the **same thing** preached to us, and we both need the **same access** to the Father through the **same** Spirit of Christ.

Now if you're sitting there thinking, "Well, this is unrealistic. How can there not be any hostility? It doesn't take into account the fact that conflict is part of being human. Paul seems to be way too optimistic." I beg to differ. For all the conflict that we have: ISIS, presidential elections, terrorists, and definitely problems with race demonstrated in Ferguson and now in Charlotte. For all the conflict we have and how inescapable and inevitable it seems, conflict, division, and disunity are **unnatural**. We know this because it is a product of the Fall. It's part of the curse. Look at the before and after pictures. Before Adam and Eve were perfectly united in one accord. They had an intimacy and openness that is almost unthinkable today. They were in such harmony that they didn't need clothes, which are actually physical dividing walls between people. So when they sinned in Genesis 3, not only did they wreck their relationship with God, they also wrecked their relationship with each other. The text in Genesis is very clear. When they sin, their first inclination is to cover themselves, to put up walls between them. And so our goal is to have that kind of Pre-Fall conflict-free, wall-free relationship. We were made to be known and known completely. The very people that push everyone away and build impenetrable walls around their hearts show us

that we were made to be in relationship with people, real, perfect relationship. We yearn to be at peace with one another and to be in relationship. We are miserable when we're isolated. This is why isolation cells in prison are so effective in breaking down the resolve of criminals.

But to get back to the text, Christ is reconciling us to each other and to God. The word **"reconciling"** is the perfect word to use here because of its construction. The word **"reconcile"** has its root in the Latin. The prefix **"re-"** means "again", and the base word **"conciliare"** means "to bring together". We are being brought back together. It presupposes an initial unity that was broken and is not being repaired. So what was broken at the Fall in Genesis 3 is being repaired. The dividing walls are broken down as we are brought back together, in full and complete relationship. That is what Christ has done for us.

Vs. 19-22: What you are now and are becoming

Well, this restoration and reconciliation had big implications for the Christians at Ephesus, and it has big implications for us. Who we are has to change to fit who we are **now**. Just as players have to adjust to being on a new team, thinking of themselves not in terms of their old team, but in terms of their new team, we too have to change how we live according to our new reality. So there are two big questions that Paul has to answer: **(1) Who are we now in light of what Christ has done for us?** and **(2) What are we being made into? What's the final goal?**

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

So what's our new identity? Two things: **fellow citizens** and **family members**. First, we are fellow citizens. We are no longer alienated. We no longer are outside of the covenant. We are no longer strangers and foreigners. We are **now in**, and we **belong**. Citizenship is a legal term. It means that a person has been legally recognized to have pledged allegiance to and is a part of a nation. Remember how we were stateless? No more.

But we are also members of the household of God. This is huge! The people that the Jews had the most contempt and hatred for are now their brothers and sisters in Christ. Practically speaking, it's a lot to ask. You've spent a lifetime hating someone, so it's hard to change, even over the course of years. There will be times in the church where sinful people sin against each other. Those sins are real, and they hurt. But yet, Paul doesn't even seem to consider a break in unity. So when the going gets tough, when you're at your wits end because the other person is just too annoying, what do you end up coming back to? **Our unity with each other is built on nothing less than Christ himself and the apostles.** Christ is the cornerstone, the one that all the other parts of a building are built off of. So when the going gets tough in the church, we look to Jesus. We go back and look at this passage, and we see that the people that really, really annoy us have been deemed **precious** by the Lord. The Lord has bought them with the precious blood of our own Savior. He loves them **just as much** as he loves me. But that's not all.

What's the final goal? What are we being made into? We are growing into a holy temple, a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. We're not there yet. There's still work to be done. But the end is that we experience God's **presence** fully and richly.

Now, if you haven't been listening, listen up. We need the church, the body of believers. We need them to experience God's presence fully and richly. We certainly have access to the Father through Christ, but we miss so much when we are outside of the local body of Christ. We miss His presence when the church is gathered in His name. And it's this idea of being built up together to become a dwelling place for God by the Spirit that really cements the importance of the church. Later on in chapter 4 verse 15, Paul will remind us that *"we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with*

which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

Application:

The church needs all of its parts. And this has big implications for the way that the Jews looked upon the Gentiles, and it also has big implications for the way that we look at people in the church that aren't like us or are just more work to be around. Let me ask you something. **Do you see the people that are annoying, awkward, hard to be around, and demanding as people vital to the health of your walk with the Lord? Do you see them as integral parts to you experiencing the fullness of God's presence in your life?** Most likely not. I know that I don't. More often than not, I try to avoid people that tend to rub me the wrong way, and I justify my erecting barriers between me and them by saying things like, "I can only take them in small doses." "I just don't get him, he's so weird." Or "I just can't handle that right now. I've got too much on my plate as is." **But that's not grace.** That's not the unity that we're called to. Grace is radically more than just putting up with people in small doses or holding the ones that are harder and more work at arms length. That stuff **doesn't** reflect the fact that each Christian has been bought by the blood of Jesus. That stuff **doesn't** reflect the fact that each Christian is a brother or sister in Christ. We were talking about this at Modgnik with our middle school students, and the topic of younger siblings being annoying came up. And after our discussion, I asked one of them if they ever wished that their siblings weren't a part of the family. I was surprised by the answer I got. He said no, and I asked why, and he said, their position in the family has nothing to do with how annoying they are. He was able to see past the present cost of loving them to the foundational truth that they were family. It doesn't matter what they do, I still love them no matter what. That's grace. Grace is the lavishing of love upon someone that doesn't deserve it, upon someone who in fact deserves the exact opposite.

I'll end paraphrasing something that the Modgnik speaker said. He said that if we don't love the unlovely, embrace the annoying, and show grace to worst of the people in our churches, to forgive them over and over again for the same mistakes that you've told them a hundred times not to do, we will never understand what it's like for God to have to put up with us. Think about that. We get a picture of what Christ has done and continues to do for us when we love the unlovely. We understand just what the Gospel is when we forgive our friends for the millionth time for that thing that you've told them a hundred times hurts you. Because that's exactly what we do to God when we sin over and over again. We not only see Christ's Gospel when we forgive and love others, but we see Christ exhibited to us when we're the ones being annoying and hard to love. If we can show each other this radical kind of grace, the grace that Christ showed us, we will see the church grow into a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling place for God with his people.

Let's us pray silently for a moment and then I will close our time in the word.

Father, you are amazing. You have taken the outcast and the snob, and you have disarmed them both, making them one in you. Would you change our hearts, eager to love the unlovely as you have loved us. It is in Jesus' name, our cornerstone, in him we pray. Amen.