

“The Kingdom of Multiethnicity”

Ephesians 2:11-22

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Passage

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 – 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. 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 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 both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 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. 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.

Introduction

Paul begins Ephesians 2 with how God individually changes us within our broken lives. In today’s passage, Paul explains how God brings corporate unity within a broken community—which is very un-American considering how we are very individualistic and anti-institutional. The Western culture promotes individuality and harnesses the idea of doing whatever we want to in our own time and schedule. Although individuality is not detrimental, it is important to understand that true Christian life does not begin and end with our own individual relationships with God. God is not only after our hearts but also wanting to change the world through us as He changes us.

What is church? The church of Jesus Christ is a new family and represents the dwelling place of God. Essentially, He gives us a new spiritual ethnicity, which is made of multiethnicity.

I. Alienated – Where we were [11-12]

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 – 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.

A. Remember you were in sin [11-12]

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 – 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.

In verse 11, “*uncircumcision*” personifies the Gentiles, whereas “*circumcision*” personifies the Jews. Gentiles and Jews were separated from another, which is why Paul uses the word “*alienated*” in verse 12. One commentator describes the separation of two peoples in this way: Jews hated the Gentiles and believed that Gentiles were created by God to fuel the fires of hell and that God only loved Israel out of all the nations He created. It was unlawful for Jews to even help Gentile mothers give birth because they were helping in bringing another Gentile into the world. If a Jew married a Gentile, a funeral was carried out because such contact with a Gentile was an equivalent of death.

What God intended was to use weak people such as the Jews to be the light to the world and help bring redemption to all peoples through Jesus Christ. Instead of being the intended light, the Jews alienated the Gentiles because they believed that God chose them because they were better than everyone else. They misunderstood their blessing and used it to exalt themselves. Often, a source of blessing can become a source of pride, and we use it to exalt ourselves.

Within that context, Paul addresses the Gentile readers in verses 11-12 by relating the separation from Christ to the separation from the Jews. This was also true for us in our individual pre-Christian days.

B. Remember you were without God – Israel [12]

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.

1. Separated from Christ

Paul equates the separation between the Gentiles and the Israelites to the separation between the Gentiles and Jesus Christ.

2. Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel

God chose the Israelites to show what Jesus will be like to the world and what kind of Messiah was going to come through their lineage. Being alienated from the citizenship of Israel was the same thing as being alienated from the Gospel.

3. Strangers to the covenants of promise

The “*covenants of promise*” refer to God’s promise given to Abraham where a Jewish nation was going to be born out of him. All the promises

of Jesus Christ were embedded in the commandments the Israelites received and also in their lifestyles.

4. Having no hope

Because the Gentiles were separated from the promises of God and essentially separated from Christ, they had no hope. Worldly hope is very uncertain where you wish something will happen. Biblical hope is very certain where you know something will surely happen but do not know when.

5. Without God in the world

The Gentiles were without God in the world because they were separated from the Israelites to whom God was showing His promise and presence through.

Therefore, we must remember who we were because then we can be thankful and be inclusive of other people. We need to remember that although we were alienated from God, He decided to include us. When our Christian lives become stagnant, remember who you were.

Who is your Gentile? Who are people in your lives that you do not care about, dislike, or even hate? Who do you need to pray for? When someone gives you what you want, you want to include them. When someone is not useful to you, you do not want to include them. This dislike or indifference is in all of us, but God is going to do something about that.

Sometimes, the Church of Jesus Christ reflects the world because we do not love and care about one another as much as we should. The world needs to see our togetherness and love towards one another because they can be blessed and see the love of Jesus Christ in us.

II. Included – What Christ has done [13-15]

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 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,

A. Jesus brought us near [13]

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

The phrase “*you who once were far off*” emphasizes how distant the Gentiles were from Christ and how only by the blood of Christ, they were brought closer.

Acts 2:39 – *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.*

“*For all who are far off*” refers to the Gentiles who became closer to Christ. They were bought closer through the blood of Christ—which is the historical cause—and because of his blood, they were now in Christ or in an experiential nearness to Christ.

B. Jesus gave us peace [14]

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*

Jesus is the peacemaker who united both Jews and Gentiles as one in him.

Ephesians 2:11 – *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 –*

“*Broken down in his flesh*” is a reference to circumcision in verse 11. Like circumcision, Jesus Christ was cut off on our behalf so that we can be included. As Jesus was cut off, he also broke down the “*dividing wall of hostility.*”

The wall symbolizes division and pictures the temple. The temple itself was constructed on an elevated platform and surrounded by courts. The innermost court was called the court of the priests where only priests could enter. The next outer court was the court of Israel where only male Jews could enter. The next outer court was the court of women, which was the farthest court woman could enter until. From the court of women, one descended about five steps to a five-foot stone barricade. Perhaps, this was the wall that Paul was referring to. There were 14 more steps beyond this wall that descended to the court of Gentiles. According to a Jewish historian named Josephus, a message on the five-foot stone barricade stated that all trespassers will be killed. The Gentiles could not pass this wall of hostility, and it pictured a symbolic division of humanity, which was destroyed by Christ when he died on the Cross. Through Jesus Christ, the temple was now open for everyone to have access to the presence of God equally.

C. Jesus recreated us [15]

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,*

Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament laws in which he created in himself one new man. Now through Jesus, anyone can be included in New Testament church of Jesus Christ. It was much deeper than just a division between the Jews and the Gentiles.

Galatians 3:28 – “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*”

Although we are one in Christ, there are still individual differences. Only the hierarchy was eliminated. Inequality before God was now abolished with the awakening of a new humanity in Jesus Christ.

There was a commercial with multiethnic babies playing with one another. The commercial emphasized that racism was a nurturing issue. In some sense, it is true that babies learn who they hate as they grow up. However, the reality is that they were born with propensity for hatred of somebody. Part of nature is that we are going to hate someone, and part of nurture is that we choose who to hate. Essentially, racism, hatred, and dislike, all revolve around favoritism and we create circles of exclusion to alienate others. Jesus Christ broke the circles of exclusion and by his power, we are now included in the deepest and the most amazing circle of Jesus Christ.

III. Reconciled – Where we now belong [16-18]

¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 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.

A. What did He do? – Reconcile [16]

¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

Jesus Christ became the personification of hostility. He was killed on the Cross on our behalf and therefore, hostility was killed in us through the Holy Spirit.

B. How did He do it? – Preached [17]

¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

Isaiah 57:19 – “*...creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace to the far and to the near,” says the LORD, “and I will heal him.*

After Jesus’s resurrection, He preached peace to his disciples but not anyone else. It was the disciples who carried on the message of peace and this is true for us today. Jesus chooses to preach through our lips and we need to desire to be used for His glory.

C. What do we now have? – Access [18]

¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Having access means we have the freedom to enter the presence of God. While reconciliation connects us to God, our access continually builds our relationships with God. Verse 18 suggests that we have a Trinitarian access (The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), which is the most powerful circle in eternity.

CFC Multiethnicity Principle

- Natural
 - Naturally befriend someone in your daily life even if you must cross cultural barriers.
- Spiritual
 - Pray for the people you meet and love them with the love of Jesus Christ. The goal is not to increase the diversity of our church but to increase the tribe of Jesus Christ.
- Strategic
 - The Bible does not indicate that every local church needs to look like heaven, rather, the universal church needs to look like heaven. A local church can strategically and effectively reach specific people.

IV. Connected – Who we have now become [19-22]

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.

A. Kingdom – Citizens [19]

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,

Gentiles were stateless and alienated from the citizenship of Israel. Now we, as Gentiles, are together with the saints in the kingdom of God. This does not mean we disregard or ignore human citizenship. Rather, we need to be the best possible citizens while living according to God's Word to exemplify Christ.

When Paul wrote these verses, the Roman Empire was the greatest empire in the history of mankind. Paul is saying that even the Roman kingdom will die but that there is a kingdom that will never die and live on forever. There is a King that will never die, and He is Jesus Christ.

B. Family – Family members [19]

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,

“Members of the household of God” proclaim that we are family members with one another in the kingdom of God. Similarly, we need to live in our human family from the perspective of God's family.

C. Temple – Temple stones [20-22]

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.

Ephesians 2:20 – built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

The temple in Jerusalem was built from Solomon's temple to Zerubbabel's temple and then to Herod's temple. For thousand years, the temple has been a focal point of identity as the people of God. The foundation of the temple was built on the instructions given to the apostles and prophets, which was the Bible. Cornerstone was of crucial importance to a building. After the cornerstone was set, the other stones were aligned. The temple of Jerusalem had massive cornerstones, but the chief cornerstone of the new temple is Jesus Christ himself and we need to align ourselves with him.

The phrase "*grows into a holy temple in the Lord*" suggests that we grow in Christ because we are joined in Christ and become living stones that picture him. The purpose of the new temple is for us to become the dwelling place of God as He dwells in us and works through us.

Nameless stones with different shapes and sizes align to the cornerstone. We are linked together and form the dwelling place of God. Because we are building blocks, we cannot stand on our own. Only when we are connected can we build a beautiful temple of Jesus Christ. We are made to be part of something bigger than ourselves. Are you connected?

Do you know why you do not want to die? Do you know why you do not want to be in prison? Do you know why you do not want to suffer? It is because you love yourself. How many have a reason to die for? If you have a reason to die for, you are living for something other than yourself.

How many of us can die for the Gospel or go to prison for Christ? How many are willing to suffer for the sake of Christ? We are made to live for something bigger than our lives. Loving Christ and living for His glory give us the reason to live and the reason to die for.

Conclusion

There are two prayers that changed history:

Acts 10:30 – And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing

At this juncture of human history, Jews did not even think about approaching the Gentiles regarding the Gospels. In Acts 10:30, Peter brings the Gospel for the first time in history to a Gentile named Cornelius. God heard Cornelius's prayers and moved Peter to come and preach the Gospel. A prayer at the ninth hour changed the history of mankind as Gentiles started to receive the Gospel.

Matthew 27:46 – And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus also prayed at the ninth hour. Because he was alienated and rejected, we were accepted. Jesus's prayer broke our alienation from God and Cornelius's prayer broke the alienation between Jews and Gentiles.

We need to pray two prayers. First prayer is to pray to God to be joined by other bricks to become building blocks for His kingdom. Second prayer is to ask, “Who is my Cornelius?” Your Cornelius may be a nation or a neighbor.

“Picture of Communion”

This version of the picture shows disciples from every nation and every tribe instead of the 12 disciples. This picture represents the kingdom of multiethnicity.