

**CORE Seminar**  
**Spring 2024**  
**Paul's Letter to the Ephesians**  
**Week 4: Ephesians 2:11-22**

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**ICE BREAKER**

Choose an ice breaker from the *Spring Community Group Guide* or go to [www.fbcportland.org/icebreakers](http://www.fbcportland.org/icebreakers) to select an ice breaker to ask your group.

- Spend about 5 minutes discussing the question – this is a great way to “warm up” your group.

**HANGOUT NIGHT**

Spend time discussing next weeks Hangout Night:

- What you are going to do?
- Who will host?
- What will everyone bring?

**INTRODUCTION**

Last week we spent a time in **Ephesians 2:1-10**. **Ephesians 2:1-10** depicts the spiritual condition of all of man – once dead in trespasses and sins, captive to the ways of the world and influenced by evil. All of this separated us from God – the Jew's heritage could not bridge that gap. Only by God's grace and the work of Jesus Christ can believers be brought from spiritual death to life, redeemed and reconciled with God.

Today, we're going to complete the second chapter of Ephesians. In **Ephesians 2:11-22**, Paul talks about a deep and complex rivalry between Jews and Gentiles. This rivalry involved religious differences, as the Gentiles were not familiar with the God of Israel, and it was also influenced by cultural distinctions of that time. The Jews had unique rituals, feasts, and ceremonies that set them apart. Additionally, there was a racial aspect, with the Jews boasting about their lineage from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Despite all of these “differences,” there is one thing that brought them together – the blood of Jesus Christ. Through the cross, they were not only reconciled to God, but they were also reconciled to each other – OR united to each other.

Let's pray and we'll get started:

## PRAYER

**QUESTION: Ok, before we begin – a quick question - why is a unified church a great witness to the unbelieving world?**

- **What's happens when a church is not unified?**
- **What kind of witness does the church have then?**

As he penned the letter to the church at Ephesus, we can really see how Paul viewed unity in the local church. In his view, it held a high priority and we can understand why – for the sake of the gospel! So, as we read today, let us keep in mind the importance of church unity and work with our brothers and sisters as the church takes the gospel to the ends of the earth!

## Have someone read Ephesians 2:11-13

***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.***

In **verse 11**, Paul begins this section of the letter with “therefore,” indicating a direct connection with the previous section. In addition, he calls the Gentiles in the church at Ephesus to **“remember.”** To remember, who they once were – dead in their sins and trespasses. And really, this line of thinking piggy-backs off of how Paul **BEGAN chapter 2 [verses 1-3]** – that they were dead in their sins and were children of wrath! **Ephesians 2:1-5** paint a dark picture of what life – apart from Christ – involves. It involves being separated from God and from the people of God.

In fact, separated from the people of God even revealed a physical difference between Jew and Gentile. The Ephesians were predominantly Gentiles by birth [**“in the flesh”**]. Because of this, they were despised by the Jews – even called “dogs” in the New Testament. A devout Jew would daily pray: “God, I thank you that I was not born a Gentile.” The Jews called Gentiles, “uncircumcised,” a term of derision [**1 Samuel 17:36**]. Because of this difference, Paul states that the Gentiles were **“alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”** Because they didn't know the promises of God – they were hopeless and godless. Without God, they turned to idols and the futility of their own minds [**Romans 1:18-23**].

Everything looks bad – even worse than the beginning of chapter 2 - but then Paul throws in **verse 13**, “*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*”

- Only by the **blood** of Jesus Christ can we be made clean and brought near to God.
- Only by His **blood** can we be reconciled to God.
- Only by His **blood** can we be regenerated.

And this story – the story of the Gentiles – is our story. Before we trusted in Jesus for salvation, we were in the same position – dead in our sins. We were eternally separated from God and from His people. Just as Paul called the church to “remember,” we too need to “remember.” If we continue to remember where we came from, we will live with constant gratitude toward God and love toward others.

**QUESTIONS:** *How does it affect you to “remember” your past life before you came to faith in Jesus Christ [2:11-12]?*

- *According to Paul in 2:13, how have the Gentile believers now been brought near to God and to the church?*
- *Personally, what comes to mind when you see the words in verse 13 “but now in Christ Jesus”?*

*Just like the Jews and Gentiles in the church at Ephesus, today’s church also has “friction.” In what situations, and for what reasons, does the church experience tension and friction?*

- *What kinds of things tend to cause friction between believers?*
- *Does social media help or hinder friction in the church?*

Ok – let’s move on to the next set of verses.

**Have someone read Ephesians 2:14-18**

*<sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> 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, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

In **verses 14-18**, Paul takes time to show how the church’s **reconciliation** with God [often referred to as the **vertical**] described in **verse 13** leads to reconciliation with each other [often referred to as our **horizontal** response]. Although Paul doesn’t refer to our

reconciliation as vertical and horizontal – NOPE he uses a much cooler term **“the dividing wall of hostility.”**

And honestly thinking about that – typically – can we walk through walls?

- The answer is no – we can’t walk through walls.
- And not only that – when we are presented with a wall we often have to go out of our way to get around the wall...

Now imagine if that was hostility – and that hostility was so prevalent that it became a dividing wall.

- With God [the vertical] - our sin is the dividing wall. Christ is our redeemer who came to break down that dividing wall and redeem us from our sin.
- Now with each other [the horizontal] – **what is the dividing wall of hostility AND is it always the same... or does it change.**

**QUESTIONS: What work does Jesus’ death on the cross accomplish for those people who were alienated from Him? [2:14-16]**

- **How does Paul explain the implications of Christ’s death for Jews and Gentiles together?**

**What word pictures does Paul use throughout this passage to illustrate our separation from one another [before Christ] and our unity with one another [through Christ]?**

- **What metaphors or pictures from these verses are particularly powerful?**

**How does Paul say that we – the church [horizontal] – overcome the “dividing wall of hostility” when it exists between believers?**

- **Throughout Scripture, how are we instructed to overcome this division?**

Ok – let’s finish up the chapter.

**Have someone read Ephesians 2:19-22**

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

What’s funny is that Peter basically says the same thing in **1 Peter 2:4-5** –

***<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup> you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***

Consistency of Scripture... but going back to Paul's letter...

Paul goes on and uses additional pictures and metaphors concerning our relationship with one another. He uses three pictures in this section:

- **Citizens, Saints & Family** - *you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*

In light of what Paul has said in **verses 14- 18** ["So then"], his Gentile readers are no longer separated/ alienated from the Jews [**verse 12**], but are "fellow citizens" with them, both groups now taking on a new, similar designation, "saints." Formerly "without God" [**verse 12**], they are now members of His household [**Have someone read Romans 9:25-26**]. They are family now.

This is another reason why we refer to First Baptist as a "Family." We are all called to this place – united in faith in Christ – and connected to live out the work of the gospel.

- **Building** - *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together*

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the church. And we – the fellow workers – make up the building [**1 Corinthians 3:9**], symbolizing unity [*Paul uses a similar metaphor in Ephesians 4:16*]. Unlike a literal building, the church is described as a living organism that is continuously growing. This fits with Jesus' promise in **Matthew 16:18** that "**on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**" And guess what, ALL believers [*including you and I*] are seen as integral building blocks within this dynamic structure of God.

- **And as a holy temple** - *a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

The temple, described in **1 Kings 8:10-11**, was where God's concentrated presence, known as the "Shekinah Glory," resided. With the Spirit indwelling each believer individually [**1 Corinthians 6:19**], the collective body of believers is considered as being indwelt by the Spirit [**1 Corinthians 3:16**]. The shift is evident – God's presence, once confined to the Jewish temple, is now found within the church.

**QUESTION: How might these new labels and titles that are given to those who have come to Christ – the Gentiles - be deeply encouraging to these new believers? [2:19-20]**

**Which of the three illustrations of the church in 2:19-22 [“family – members of the household of God,” or “stones – cornerstones,” or “a temple - dwelling place for God by the Spirit”] made the biggest impact on you? Explain why.**

#### **OPTIONAL SIDE NOTE ON ETERNAL UNITY -**

**Revelation 7:9-12** points out to this absolutely beautiful day when the “multi-ethnic” bride of Christ will gather before His throne and eternally sing praises to His Name!

- ***“a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, <sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”***

Just think about this for a moment – do you see any dividing walls of hostility in this verse? [nope]

What do you see?

- A great multitude – that no one could number
- From every nation – tribe – people and language
- All standing before the throne of God
- Clothed in purity – in white robes
- Palm branches in hand – crying out with a loud voice, ***“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”***

What a beautiful picture of the church!!

**OPTIONAL QUESTIONS: In what way should these verses in Revelation shape your expectation of heaven – and eternity?**

**What impact should this vision have on your understanding of what the church of God is like even today?**

**CONCLUSION**

In the fourth major section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians [2:11-22], Paul continues to remind the church [as he did in 2:1-10] of their sinful past – although this time he reminds them of the hostility that existed between Jew and Gentile. He begins by establishing the fact that they are Gentiles in the flesh [2:11], then “fleshing out” [no pun intended] the spiritual implications of this fact [2:12].

The good news is that according to Paul, all is not lost. Paul reminds the Ephesians that their separation from God [“dividing wall of hostility”] has been removed through the reconciling work of Christ [2:13]. Not only has their separation from God ended, BUT ALSO the “dividing wall” that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles has been removed due to the reconciling work of Christ [2:14-15].

Their horizontal reconciliation with the Jews was made possible only as a result of their vertical reconciliation to God [2:16-18]. As a result the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, the Gentiles are now eternally unified with the Jews – as brothers and sisters - as the church [2:19a], which Paul likens to a family/ a household [2:19b], a building [2:20-21a], and a temple [2:21b-22].

**Next Week: HANGOUT NIGHT!!**

**CLOSING PRAYER**