

I grew up learning from a young age the concept that God's aim was not religion. That is, what He desired for me and from me was not merely that I went to church, checked the box, prayed, checked the box, gave some money, served a little here/there, did some good works and checked the box. I learned early His design was a **RELATIONSHIP** with me. We like that thought. And many of us have gotten used to the notion that we have a real **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP** with God.

Now that is true. We do. And I delight in it. It is wonderful knowing that God loves ME. God cares about ME. God is working on MY behalf, in my reality, and doesn't have this generic "love" for this personalized love for ME. Great news, it really is.

But I fear something has happened. Because I have this **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP** with God, through Christ, I almost come to view it as exclusive to Me and Him. But the purpose of God while Personal is also Corporate. That is, if you have a **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP** with GOD, you also have a **CORPORATE RELATIONSHIP** with His people.

In the immediate context of **Ephesians 2:11-22** Paul is writing to a church that is predominantly made up of people who are non-Jews. And he writes here to emphasize not their differences with Jews and Gentiles, but of what actually unites them.

I said when I opened teaching on Ephesians that **UNITY** is the major theme that runs throughout. Well you will feel it today.

And rather than look across the room at one another and feel our differences, and believe me, I feel them, you feel them, we need to look at Christ and see how HE unites and how deep that **UNITY** goes. And if you hear nothing of what I say at least hear this - The **BLOOD OF CHRIST** Unites us at a **DEEPER LEVEL** than even our own **BLOODLINES**. Yes, your own ethnicity. Your own genetics. Your own family. And He calls us to **LIVE Together** in light of that.

Well look at the divide between Jews and Gentiles in vv11-12

**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 common-wealth of Israel and STRANGERS to the covenants of promise, HAVING NO HOPE and WITHOUT God in the world.**

You feel the difference between people right away in this passage by the names that are brought up. One is called **GENTILES**. And who would call them such? Jews would. If you were a Roman citizen, of non-Jewish descent you didn't call each other Gentile. Only a Jew would call you as such. It was **SINGLE** category for ALL non Jews.

Another way they were distinguished v11 - one group is called **the uncircumcision** while the other is called **the circumcision**. Of course circumcision being a physical sign of the covenant . A man's foreskin was cut away as a sign that one was a Jew.

And now look at what Paul wishes to highlight of the Gentiles v12 - **SEPARATED, ALIENATED, STRANGERS** Those words pretty well sum up the division, the differences between these Jews and Gentiles.

And he concludes this section with - **HAVING NO HOPE and WITHOUT GOD**

I don't believe any of us appreciates this for what Paul and his audience did. These groups were so different - Jews and Gentiles. The foods they ate, the practices they participated in - but more than all that - as they **STOOD IN RELATION TO GOD**. And one would mutilate their male organ as a sign, keep commands from an ancient book, all because they said they were **GOD'S PEOPLE**.

That is naturally going to **SEPARATE, ALIENATE** you. But really they weren't inaccurate. God did Go to the Jews and choose them. God did hand-select them as his people. It was clear to the **JEWS** and to anyone who knew - you were God's if you were a Jew, but if not, you had **NO PART IN GOD**. And no hope to get to HIM some way you dreamed up.

But there is a shift in v13 - **But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility**

If you are wanting to track Paul here we will divide this into 3 parts -  
1) What God Did about this DIVIDE - and right in v 14 Paul tells us -  
**HE MADE US ONE**

There are no longer TWO GROUPS of people. I really don't believe God looks at Jews and Gentiles. He looks at HIS PEOPLE. And while we may bring up distinctive God doesn't. This isn't at all for GOD'S SAKE that Paul writes this, but for the Jew/Gentiles sake. They need to know.

Gentiles are not some second-tier people and Jews first-tier. Gentiles are not some left-over scrap, and God saying, "Oh, I guess, if they are all that is left, I'll take them, but I still would prefer more Jews." But they are ONE, UNITED, the very LOVED, CHOSEN, HOLY people of God - whether from Jewish or Gentile bloodlines. What has He done - MADE US ONE

But further - v14 - **broken down ... the dividing wall of hostility**  
No longer could a Jew tout they were more favored. Not true. No longer would a Gentile feel the taunts, spoken or not. They would know they was no distinction and so naturally the hostility between them would be abolished.

ILL - I remember as a kid, the divide right down the middle of the city of Berlin. It marked the central place of East and West Germany. Two opposing ideological systems that dominated each side of the wall. One communist ruled by the Soviet Union on the East, the other a democracy influenced by the Western world. And people took up arms and maliciousness because of the wall. And in my youth, I was able to see it come down. The wall came down. Germany was not East and West, but just GERMANY. This is how GOD sees HIS PEOPLE. Not Jewish and Gentile people, but HIS PEOPLE.

Let that affect you from a RACIAL standpoint for a moment. Like it or not, we are all influenced heavily by race. Our own race, and/or the race of others. We see things, hear things and some of them even

accurately represented. It causes a stirring in us. In other words, our differences rise to the surface and we allow for this to divide us. Now I am not saying, Go link up with every minority you can. First of all, that is not what Paul is saying. But he is saying, Don't let your RACE define you. And don't let it divide you as Christians. If you are Christians, your Christianity defines you, not your race, where you live, what you own...

2) Why God Did This - **v21b 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.**

To grow into a Holy Temple - The purpose of any temple and belief of the ancients was that your god would dwell in the temple you built for him. Paul doesn't seek to oppose this at all, in fact he embraces it, but rather than talk about some physical temple, he says "You, me, we are that temple." In other words - as God unites Jew and Gentile, and as He unites Christians to one another, He is building for Himself a temple.

And this is the picture of the END of time. In eternity. God will dwell with His people. But it isn't just a futuristic glimpse of God and His people, it is reality NOW. He is dwelling in us, with us, among us. We don't see it though.

ILL - Greg can build things. Need an addition built onto your house, or a new house - Greg is your guy. And I trust over the years he has worked with stones, bricks, and wood in building various rooms. The rooms are the goal, for dwelling in, for people to live in. Greg has hopefully never showed up on a job site and merely brought all the stones, brick, and wood and dropped it from the back of his truck and said, "here you go." And then drove off. He knows that simply putting those near one another, or in the same area, does not make them a dwelling place. INTENTIONAL EFFORT need to be taken to link them together. It is a process.

So too with us - IT IS A PROCESS. And a lot of us nod at the notion that we are GOD'S TEMPLE, yet we resist the work He does to bring us together. We observe DIFFERENCES and remain divided. And I

am not even talking differences with those not a part of this church, but differences among us. Or we just haven't made efforts to link up and connect. More on that later.

We've observed the WHAT God did, and WHY He did it - but

3) How does GOD do this?

First a word on what DIVIDES US -All that divides us is - out here. It is what we see. Look briefly at what defined the relationships of Jew/Gentile before. It can be summed up by looking at the prepositional phrases Paul uses

Gentiles - **in the flesh**

Circumcision - **which is made IN THE FLESH**

And then note the powerful prepositional phrase to end v. 12 All they didn't have, all that divided them was because it was defined simply on who they were **IN THE WORLD**.

Who are YOU in the WORLD? It is largely comprised of 1) where you came from, 2) money you have, 3) color of your skin, 4) education you possess, 5) what you DO. That is in large part how we are defined here and now. And it quickly exposes our differences. It is not to the same degree of what Paul is speaking of, but serves us to think how we IN THE FLESH define ourselves or IN THE WORLD define ourselves. And it creates for massive differences/divisions.

Back to HOW God does this UNITING WORK. Paul uses many phrases here - I want you to hear them

Follow along **v13 - But now IN CHRIST JESUS**

**v13 - by the Blood of Christ**

**v14 - in HIS FLESH**

**v15- IN HIMSELF**

**v16- through the CROSS**

**v18 - through HIM**

**v21 - In WHOM**

**v22 - IN HIM**

Everything shifts IN CHRIST. He does it first of all between you and GOD. v16 - (he came and gave His life) that **He might reconcile us**

**both to God ...and v18 - through HIM we both have access in one SPIRIT to the Father.**

But Paul doesn't stop there. Again, this is the reality of the language we use as we say, "By Christ I have a personal relationship with God." yes, that is true. He reconciled you. But He reconciled you to God, so that you would also be a part of ONE ANOTHER. A Corporate relationship.

Paul lays it out in 2 ideas

- 1) the Political Realm - v19 - citizens. You are citizens with the Jews. No foreigner, no stranger, no alien among them. WE are citizens together. But if it is politically only that isn't very deep. I don't agree with every CONSERVATIVE just because I am conservative. There are deeper bonds than just this.
- 2) Of the same Family - v18 we read of God the Father. IN v19 - Paul says we are members of household of God. These convey idea of FAMILY. And it makes sense. The BLOODLINE OF CHRIST is greater than any other bloodlines.

This would have revolutionized the church in Ephesus. Jews and Gentiles spending time together. Jews and Gentiles seeing one another not in the FLESH or as they had done IN THE WORLD. But IN CHRIST, THROUGH CHRIST, BY CHRIST.

And what this and so much else of the NT is telling us - we need to see one another in CHRIST. And when we do, the deepest levels of commitment and love and unity should result.

Hear me on this - I love my family. I believe they love me.

What unites me to my family is BLOOD. I have the bloodlines of mom and dad mixed up in me. And the time we spent together and all they poured into me, has made me who I am. And I love them. They love me. But there is a greater BLOOD than that in ME, in YOU, in all who are truly followers of CHRIST - it is the BLOOD OF CHRIST (not literally). And when I grasp that, when I truly grasp that, I will be even more committed to you than I would be to those whose blood is in my veins.

I don't sense there is animosity among us. I don't sense walls between us. But I don't believe we should be content to merely call ourselves members of the same CHURCH. It is about life together, about sharing joys and pains together, and about sharing burdens together. Do you have a PERSONAL Relationship? Or do you rightly have a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD and recognize it brings you into a CORPORATE RELATIONSHIP?

1. Please be here every Sunday. Please prioritize it. Unity is theoretic unless we gather together
2. Learn to see one another IN CHRIST. No loners out there. No longer NOT CARING for one another. No longer "oh they hurt me (but FORGIVEN). No longer - Oh, they always do that (yes, maybe they do, but help them see who they are in CHRIST, by doing what you are supposed to do IN CHRIST)
3. Strive for RECONCILIATION. No matter what - if you are IN CHRIST and they are - STRIVE for it. Husbands/ WIVES - talk, forgive, sacrifice your own pride. Kids/Parents - be humble, take responsibility. And people here - talk openly about pains about hurts, about sins, and work to reconcile. NO matter what! Christ demands it of us.
4. Welcome people you don't know, or don't know well. I am ever amazed as to how I can meet someone in a city I used to live and connect a bit. I emailed a friend from Highschool recently, but found the conversation hit a wall. Why? Because she doesn't know Christ. And I have found people I never knew, never lived near, and we start talking and find out we know Christ, and there is this bond. This deep bond. That is the BLOODLINE of CHRIST in us. He links us. You have more in common with a CHRISTIAN you don't know, than you do with someone who is not a CHRISTIAN who you may know perfectly. And that BOND is powerful.

What do you normally substitute for community?

What personal barriers have you created to community?

What unhealthy ways have you processed loneliness in your past?

What benefits of community would most help you now?

What adjustments do you need to make to give space for community?