



Northland Christian Church

THE POWER OF GRACE: DIVISION TO UNITY • EPHESIANS 2:11-22 • 11/22/2020

MAIN POINTS FROM WEEKEND MESSAGE

The same blood that removes the stain of sin also removes the stigma of separation.

Jesus not only puts to death the wrath of God against people, He puts to death the wrath of people against people.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What group of people do you feel the strongest sense of community with—your family, your coworkers, your friend group, your church, your neighbors, other? What is it about that group that makes you so comfortable?

Is it easy or difficult for other people to break into that group and find the same closeness that you enjoy? Explain.

Share about a time you felt like an outsider with a certain group of people. Did you eventually break-in? If so, what happened? If not, why not?

We all long to belong. It's a God-given desire to be part of a community of people that accepts us for who He created us to be. This week's study will show us that Jesus died to fulfill our need to belong by making us citizens of a new kingdom. But living in community isn't easy. Anytime you bring sinners into proximity with other sinners, challenges assuredly arise. Ephesians 2 helps us know how we can overcome this reality to build healthy communities.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 2:11-12.

What did Paul say we should remember? Why do you think Paul wanted his audience, and us today, to remember our former alienation from citizenship in God's kingdom?

How should these verses impact the way you feel about and relate to people who are not part of the community of faith? How should these verses impact the way you feel about and relate to people who are part of the community of faith?

Was Paul's point here to make the Ephesians feel less than Jewish believers? If not, what was his point?

In verses 11-12, Paul told us that we were apart from Christ, separated from God, and without hope. It's really a bleak picture. Thankfully, Paul didn't end there. His point wasn't to make the Ephesian believers feel like they were second-class church members to the Jewish Christians; rather, he wanted them to remember the amazing change that had taken place through Christ's reconciliation on their behalf. When we remember that we were once outsiders, it helps us rightly relate to those who are outsiders in the faith.

Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 2:13-18.

Why did Paul mention "the blood of Christ" here? In relationship to our new identity and community, what did the blood of Christ do for us?

Have you ever considered that there is a dividing wall of hostility between those who are in Christ and those who are not? What does that mean?

Based on these verses, what place is there for walls between us and other believers? What should you do if there is hostility between you and another believer?

Our alienation was bleak, but Christ's blood overwhelmed the darkness with light. It overwhelmed our alienation with victorious reconciliation. Jesus' blood is the bridge that brings us near to God, though we were once far off. Not only did this bring us near to God, but it also brought us into His kingdom as fellow citizens, tearing down the wall of hostility that stood between us. God's kingdom is a kingdom of peace and unity—we must all work to nurture that peace and unity.

Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 2:19-22.

Paul shared three pictures of the community we become a part of when we're reconciled to one another. Which of these pictures do you need the most in your life right now? Why?

How would you respond to someone who says, "I love Jesus, but I don't love His church"?

What does it mean to be a member of God's household, a building built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ, growing into a holy temple?

Paul's message to his original audience was that both Jews and Gentiles were part of the same family, the same kingdom, the same building, the same temple. Being reconciled with God doesn't mean that working in unity with people who are different is easy. But even though it's not easy to live in unity with other believers, Jesus died to bring us together. So it must be important! Jesus died for His church. That's all of us—you, me, people who are different from us, and even people who are legitimately hard to get along with.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your commitment to Christian community? Explain.

What are some ways we can intentionally nurture the kind of community described in Ephesians 2?

Is there a broken relationship in your life where unity is difficult to maintain in your own efforts? How does Ephesians 2 challenge and encourage you in that relationship?

If You Have Time

Pastor Dave shared three things for us to do in regards to this passage today. Walkthrough these with your group if you have time.

1. Acknowledge any hostility in your heart toward others.
2. Ask Jesus to change your heart.
3. Aim for Christ-centered reconciliation.

Have they taken the time to apply these three steps?

What would hinder them from doing so?

What questions do they have about these steps?

PRAYER

Thank God that, in Christ, He tore down the dividing wall of hostility that existed between us. Ask Him to help you be a person who determinedly seeks to build on the peace and unity Jesus brought so that His kingdom community would display His love and grace to a world that so desperately needs Him.

Group materials modified from smallgroup.com materials by Tony Merida

COMMENTARY

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

2:11. Paul asked those who were Gentiles to review what their lives had been like at one time, that is, before their salvation. (Gentiles were those who were not Jews either ethnically or religiously. That is, they had not descended from the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and they were not under the Old Testament covenant.) The alienation between Jews and Gentiles was based on observable differences in the flesh of both groups. For example, Jewish males had been marked by the religious ritual of circumcision. This rite symbolized that they belonged to the covenant family. Gentile males had no such mark. This led to an easy way for Jews to indulge in name-calling.

2:12. The terrible Gentile condition extended beyond racial discrimination. They had been deprived of the spiritual blessings that Jews had enjoyed for centuries. Paul mentioned five areas of deficit. (1) They were without the Messiah: the Jews expected a coming King who would rule the world in righteousness. Their Scriptures were clear, and the Gospels show that initially many first-century Jews readily welcomed Jesus because they expected their Messiah to come (John 1:41). (2) Excluded from the citizenship of Israel: the Israelite nation had been founded under God's direction. God was their true King. (3) Were foreigners to the covenants of the promise: God's covenants (solemn agreements) had been made only with Israelites, such as Abraham and David (Gen. 15; 2 Sam. 7). (4) Were without hope: therefore, Gentiles were without the hope that Jews had for the Messiah. Furthermore, they were without any hope of salvation or eternal life. Although God had planned to include Gentiles in His salvation, they knew nothing about it until they heard the gospel. (5) Were without God in the world: the phrase without God also can be translated as "godless." The Gentiles had plenty of gods, but they were without knowledge of the one true God. They had no personal relationship with Him.

2:13. Paul had starkly reminded his Gentile readers that they had been hopeless and godless before their salvation. Or, as he put it in this verse, Gentiles had been far away from God. The words But now mark a transition. Because through faith Gentiles now are in Christ, the past deprivation is gone. They have now been brought near. Paul explained the means by which this happened: the blood of the Messiah. Only by the atoning death of the Jewish Messiah could Gentiles (or Jews, for that matter) come into a right and near relationship with God. In these verses Paul spoke both to Gentile believers (“you”) and to Jewish Christians (“we”). He described how both groups have been joined together into God’s new people.

2:14. Hostility (antagonism) characterized the natural relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul taught that peace (cessation of hostility, harmonious friendship) summarizes the supernatural relationship between these groups, brought about because He (the Messiah) removed the barriers between them. Through His death, Jesus made both groups one. Where there had been two hostile parties—Jews and Gentiles—there was now a third possibility, the body of Christ.

2:15. The main issue separating Jew and Gentile was the law of the commandments in regulations. By this Paul referred to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, such as those concerning sacrifices, dietary restrictions, and ritual cleanness (see also Col. 2:16-17). Jesus did not abolish the moral laws of the Old Testament. These laws show how God’s people ought to live. Furthermore, even moral laws were never intended by God as a means for salvation (see Rom. 3:20). Ceremonial Jewish regulations were done away with by His death; they were shadows pointing forward to His coming. Now that Jesus has come, the shadows have vanished in His light. He has now created one new man—a new humanity—from the two old groups, Jews and Gentiles. In Christ, there is now peace both between Jews and Gentiles as well as between humans and God.

2:16. Not only did Jews and Gentiles need to be reconciled to each other, but members of both groups needed to come into right relationship with God. Thus, Jesus died also so that He might reconcile both groups to God. He did this by dying for them in one body, the church (5:25).

2:17. Jesus’ death did not automatically unite all Jews and all Gentiles into one body; neither did it automatically reconcile all persons to God. Yet His death was essential. Paul now turned to another essential ingredient to the gospel—its proclamation. Both Jews and Gentiles needed to hear the message of reconciliation and respond to it. At Jesus’ coming, He first proclaimed peace to those who were near, that is, to the Jews. Historically, the gospel came first to them. Through the apostles and the early Christian preachers, the message was also declared to the Gentiles, who were far away (Rom. 1:16).

2:18. The death of Jesus is the only means by which we both—Jews and Gentiles— have access to God. Although Jews had been near, they did not think of themselves as having intimate access to God. The entire sacrificial system reminded them of their sins and the unapproachable holiness of God. Now all believers can come to God intimately, as our Father. Our connection to God is granted by one Spirit, given alike to all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, free or slave, rich or poor.

2:19. The “you” language throughout this passage refers to those born as Gentiles. Such believers are no longer what they were. The word foreigners was a reminder of their previous deprivation as those “excluded from the citizenship of Israel” (2:12). The term strangers was a reminder that Gentiles had no knowledge of “the covenants of the promise” (2:12). By contrast, in the new humanity Jews and Gentiles together are fellow citizens with one another in the kingdom of God. The saints may refer either to Old Testament people or to all believers in the church (1:1). If the term citizens suggests that Jewish and Gentile believers are part of the same kingdom, then members of God’s household means that both groups belong equally to God’s one true family.

2:20-22. In these verses Paul used the metaphor of a building to clarify what it means to be a part of the church. Building construction begins with a foundation. The apostles and prophets were the foundation of the church in the sense of being the ones who laid the foundation by preaching the gospel. Churches today stand only when they depend on the foundational truths God revealed to the apostles and prophets, now preserved in the Scriptures. But Christ Jesus Himself is the solid foundation on which His church is built.

Jesus also is the cornerstone. Builders used a cornerstone to connect two walls, align them, hold them together, and strengthen them. In ancient times important buildings had a massive cornerstone that was essential to keep the building in line and holding it together. This language was borrowed from the Old

Testament (see Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16). Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of His church, is the only sure foundation of faith.

The term whole building does not refer to an actual structure but to the church as the people of God who are His new temple. Individual believers are compared to the stones being added to the whole building. Each believer is fitted together by the Master Builder, who places each stone as He desires. The words holy sanctuary (traditionally, temple) imply this building was set apart for God's use. The Ephesians were well acquainted with the unholy temples in their city. They knew well that the whole idea of a temple was to serve as a house or dwelling place for a god. (See Acts 19:23-34.)

As Paul concluded this section of his letter, he emphasized the ongoing process by which Jesus is building His church. He wrote you also are being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit. Paul's return to you language in verse 22 reminded his readers again that they had been included in God's plan. They were being built together with Jewish Christians to become God's dwelling place on earth. It wasn't the stone-and-gold temple in Jerusalem but instead God's new people the church in which the Spirit was present. God's new humanity, scattered around the world but meeting in local congregations, is His home. What He is building through the ages, as more and more people believe and are added to His body, will one day be complete (see Rev. 21:5).