

Ephesians 2:11-22

Ephesians
Why Can't We All Just Get Along?

Video Intro: *One Cross, One Body* The Work Of The People

They seemed like they had a happy marriage. They had two kids, a nice house, great jobs, and even went to church together, but the truth was they had no real relationship any more. At this point they were only together for the sake of the children.

Two women, members of the same church, were both actively involved, both believers in Jesus, both read their Bibles and prayed. But, because of some petty problem from years gone by, they hadn't spoken to each other in ages.

There were two churches in the same town. Both believed the Bible, both taught salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, both wanted to reach their town with the gospel. But neither wanted anything to do with the other. They thought they were in competition.

Two families lived next door to each other. Both were religious. Both taught their children the Bible. But, they came from two different racial backgrounds and they never wanted to spend time together. They were neighbors geographically, but for all practical purposes, they were complete strangers.

The illustrations could go on and on but all around us in everyday life we find the same thing happening again and again.

People isolated, separated, and distant.

Of course lonely, distant people aren't anything new. That's why a 2000 year old book of the Bible, the book of Ephesians, hits right at the heart of the problem of isolation and division.

The Bible has plenty to say about unity. In fact it's one of the main subjects of the New Testament.

But it still seems like we usually have the most trouble doing the things that God talks most about.

In fact, that's probably why God uses such an abundance of verses on certain subjects. God tells us over and over again what we need to hear the most.

So what's the solution?

Last week we looked at Ephesians 2:1-10. There we saw what God has done in Christ to bring individuals to Himself.

To day we're going to pick up in verse 11 where the overriding theme is going to be oneness.

The specific situation that Ephesians 2 deals with isn't one we deal with today. The situation is different, but the principles we use to solve the problem are the same.

Back in Chapter 1 and verse 10 God let us in on His ultimate plan. This is what He's ultimately working all things toward. *In the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him.*

Now if God's great purpose is to make us all one, and He's done that for all believers spiritually now and He's going to physically unite us under the headship of Christ in the future, then how totally out of line is it for disputes and fighting and jealousy and all these types of relational sins to dominate our lives.

For those individuals and congregations that can't get along God's message is, "You're one. you're united in Christ and if you aren't too crazy about rubbing shoulders here on the planet, what do you think you're going to do in heaven for forever?

What are you going to say, "Man, I didn't expect to see you here!"

What we're about to look at is essential, pivotal truth that each of us needs to know and understand.

It's almost impossible for us living in the 21st century to think they way people did in the Roman Empire 2000 years ago but I think we can at least get a sense of how they saw life.

The Bible opens with a clear declaration of the unity of all people through creation. From Adam to Abraham, which was about 2000 years, there were now Jewish people.

Somewhere around 2000 BC God selected a man named Abraham and promised him that his descendants would be specially blessed.

From that day forward there were two groups of people, Jews and Gentiles. But remember, it was God who created that distinction.

Now it's important to realize that God didn't chose Abraham or the Jewish people because there was something about them that made them more acceptable than other people.

In the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, God used Moses to speak to the Jews and this is what He said, *You are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.*

Now that could make you kind of proud so just to clear up any misunderstandings God follows up with this explanation: *The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you...*" Deuteronomy 7:6-8

God made a sovereign choice to create a people for Himself because He had a special purpose for them. *This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.* Isaiah 43:21

God created the people of Israel be an example of godliness and to proclaim God's truth to the world.

Romans 3:2 says, *To them were committed the oracles of God.* Every book of the Bible, with the exception of Luke, was written by Jews. It was through the Jewish people that Jesus Christ came into the world.

The whole Christian faith is built on Jewish Scriptures, a Jewish messiah, and Jewish prophets.

Since so much was riding on the Jewish people God set up certain boundaries of law, religion, and culture to keep them distinct. He didn't want them to just be assimilated into the rest of humanity and loose their identity.

The problem came in that Israel succumbed to the problem we all have to fight, and that's pride. God said, "I'm setting my love on you because I've chosen you to fulfill My purpose. You're there to make my renown famous."

The Israelis turned that around and got the idea that they must be superior to everybody else. Instead of being a blessing to the world they became hated and despised.

William Barclay, in his commentary on Ephesians, fills us in on some of the background: "The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that He made. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in childbirth, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world."

"By the time of Christ the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl the funeral of that boy was carried out by the family. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death."

Talk about alienation and hatred. You couldn't get a higher score on the "hate meter" than these guys. And yet God did something to bring these two groups together in an amazing way.

When you catch this, and you see what God has done, you'll have an entirely different outlook and it'll become just a natural thing to forgive and love.

So lets look at Ephesians 2 (**Open your Bibles to Ephesians 2 pg 1038**)

As we pick up in verse 11 today were going to see a portrait of an alienated humanity. **Read 11**

Last week when we looked at the beginning of this chapter, we saw how the Bible portrays all of us in spiritual death. We all need a Savior and the Savior is Jesus Christ.

Now we see the Gentile people in particular.

Obviously the vast majority of you here today are Gentiles in the flesh. We have a few people with a Jewish heritage, but for the most part you're non-Jews.

Today we practice circumcision for medical reasons but in the first century only Jewish babies were circumcised. Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant. It marked a true Jew.

Gentiles didn't have that identifying mark. They didn't want it. They despised it.

And here's the ever-present danger of any kind of religious ritual, even if God Himself establishes it. The Jews eventually came to believe that the physical act of circumcision made them right with God.

It's like people today thinking baptism or taking communion somehow makes them right with God. If you think that then you've completely missed the point of the ceremony.

There has always been and always be one way to God. That's what Ephesians 2:1-10 is about. The one way to God is faith alone.

God uses signs and ceremonies to illustrate and remind us of His salvation and the faith we need to have in Him.

The problem is that human nature loves to latch on to the action of performing the ceremony and think that the action is the way of salvation instead of realizing the spiritual truth behind the ceremony.

I can't tell you how many times people have told me they were pretty sure they were on their way to heaven. When I asked them how they knew, they inevitably say something like this:

"I go to church. I've been baptized. I've gone to confession regularly. I give money. I do my part and so God accepts me."

That was exactly the attitude of the Jewish people. "We're of the circumcision so we're OK with God."

Just in case there's anyone here today who's trusting in a ceremony to get them to heaven, look back at 2:8-9. **Read 2:8-9**

But now, the Gentiles really were separated from God in a unique way.

Read vs 12

God had chosen the Nation of Israel to be blessed and to be a blessing to others. He promised them a Messiah, made His covenants with them, and revealed Himself as the true and living God.

Now listen, He didn't do that to any other nation. He didn't do it to the Gentiles.

They were without Christ. Only the Jews were given the hope of a Messiah. They were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. God had established Israel as a theocracy. In other words it was run by God. Non-Jews weren't a part.

The Gentiles were strangers from the covenants of promise. A covenant was an agreement between God and man. God made a series of covenants with Israel.

There was the Davidic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Palestinian Covenant, and the New Covenant.

In those covenants God gave his law, promises of blessing, a specific piece of real estate, a throne, and a government. No non-Jews were ever pulled aside and made promises by God.

The Gentiles had no hope. There was no promise of the future so there was no hope. *And then finally as kind of a summary they were without God in the world.* They weren't atheists. The Gentiles had plenty of gods, just like people do today. They worshipped their gods sincerely. But they didn't know the true and living God.

Talk about alienation and isolation.

Here's what God wants us to remember. We're never to forget how far removed we were from God before He reached down through Christ to rescue us.

So what has God done for us, anyway? **Read vs 13**

Here's another one of those times God gives us hope by using the word "but." But now Jesus Christ changed everything for us.

How could two groups who were as alienated and distinctly different as Jews and Gentiles be brought together? Only through the work of Jesus Christ. Only through His blood.

Before Gentiles could enjoy the privilege of being near to God they had to be cleansed from their sins. Remember, salvation is by grace through faith, not of works lest anyone should boast.

According to the Bible there's only one thing that can buy our forgiveness. Only Jesus Christ bearing our sins.

He died to pay for those sins. That's why those who are far from God can be brought near.

Not only that but Jesus Christ created a whole new society. It's not about heritage or ethnic background. It's about being one in the church.

Verses 14-22 are God's explanation of how all this came about. Remember, it's all centered in Christ.

This isn't about throwing truth out the window.

Just last week 400 leaders from the five major religions in Hong Kong- Christianity, Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucian held an ecumenical celebration to celebrate the unity and harmony of different religions.

The news report said, "Rev. Eric So, chairperson of the Hong Kong Christian Council, representative of Christianity, quoted the Bible from Ephesians 2 "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace," to convey the message of reconciliation."

Boy, talk about taking a verse out of context. There's no way Christianity, Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucian are united in the truth of Christ.

Religious Taoism uses the occult to attain physical immortality. Buddhism says there is no God or Supreme Creator. Islam says Jesus was never crucified. Confucian is an ethical and moral system.

There's no uniting in Christ. That's so disingenuous.

If ethics and morality made us right with God then Jesus' death would be the world's greatest travesty. But see, Jesus said things that Buddha, Mohammed, and Confucius never dared to say.

He said:

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. John 14:6

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. John 6:35

I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. John 8:12

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved. John 10:9

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. John 10:11

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. John 11:25

You can't have it both ways with Jesus. You can reject Him as a deluded liar or you can fall at His feet and worship Him as divine, but you can't make Him into simply a philosopher or ethicist and be honest.

According to the Bible, there's one way to salvation and forgiveness and that comes through Jesus. That's how we're brought near.

Now why is that? **Read vs 14**

Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, is our peace. Religion doesn't bring peace. The person of Jesus is our peace.

For Jews and non-Jews He's broken down the wall.

Herod the Great conquered Judea from the Parthians in 37 BC. He was elected "King of the Jews" by the Roman Senate and ruled for 34 years.

One of the things He did was to rebuild the Jewish temple which was originally built by Solomon.

What he built was considered one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.

The temple building was constructed on an elevated platform. Surrounding it were 3 courts. The court of the priests, the court of Israel, and the court of women, all on the same elevation as the temple proper.

On a lower level, all around the temple was the court of the Gentiles. From any place in this lower court you could see the temple but you couldn't get to it.

The imagery is this, the temple was the place of the holy of holies where God met man and the mercy seat where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on Yom Kippur.

The closest a Gentile could get to God was a wall marked with "trespasses will be executed" signs.

Jesus Christ broke down that wall. Not physically but spiritually. And here's how He did it. **Read vs 15**

The Law of Moses was good. The laws were designed to keep Israel pure and holy. Unfortunately the Jews became arrogant toward those who didn't have the law.

Not only that, but the Gentiles mocked the Jews for keeping God's laws. So the pure law of God became the basis for hatred.

Jesus abolished the law through His death. Actually. He did it by fulfilling the perfection of the law's requirements both by living by it's standards and dying to fulfill it's demands of an innocent substitute. That's why we don't keep the Sabbath or offer sacrifices.

And Jesus did that to create something. One new man from two. What He created was the church, the body.

When I was in college there were two guys who were roommates. One was a Jew and one was an Arab. Both had faith in Jesus so they were brothers in the Lord and they loved each other.

In Nicaragua There are two men who once fought against each other. One was Sandinista and the other Contra. One was wounded in battle and ended up amputating his own leg with a knife to stop the spread of gangrene.

They're both believers in Jesus and for years they traveled together singing and preaching.

And now notice, Jesus did all of this that **Read vs 16-18**

What an amazing change has taken place. There's peace and access to God the Father.

No Old Testament Jew ever addressed God as Father. He was Lord, Master, Sovereign, but never Father.

We both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Look at the results **Read vs 19**

Someone who has trusted Jesus Christ as Savior has a distinct citizenship.

Turn to the next book and look at Philippians 3:20

Roman citizenship was a valuable commodity. It had a lot of benefits in the Empire. At times Roman citizenship was even sold to those who were wealthy enough to afford it.

Philippi was a Roman colony. And even though the Philippians weren't really on Roman soil they were given citizenship. They enjoyed all the benefits and rights and privileges that went along with citizenship.

Now catch this, those who know Christ are already citizens of heaven. They may not be there yet but they enjoy all the benefits and rights and privileges that go along with citizenship.

That's the same idea back in Ephesians. A person with faith in Jesus Christ isn't an outcast. They're a citizen of a heavenly kingdom.

The majority of us here today are US citizens. We have some are citizens of other countries. But the day you die is the day your citizenship for all practical purposes ends. But a heavenly citizenship is eternal. It never ends.

Back to Ephesians 2

There's a second metaphor used in verse 19. Not only are people of faith citizens, but they're members of God's household.

This keeps getting better and better. If you're a citizen and have all kinds of rights, that's great. But it can still be impersonal. You can be a lonely citizen.

But if you're a member of the household it's a whole lot more personal. A citizen may have a right to appeal to his government but a child can go right to their father. The God who made everything out of nothing. The God who who sovereignly controls all things. The God who exists from eternity to eternity. The God to whom the nations of the world, including ours, are like a piece of dust on the scale. That God is Father to believers.

The whole universe is under His authority, and yet He always has time for His Children.

And then there's one more illustration. **Read vs 20-22**

Temples were a big deal in the ancient world. The Jews revered their temple and were proud of it.

The Ephesians had their own temples but the crown jewel was the temple of Artimus.

Tradition had it that an image of Artimus had fallen from heaven and landed in Ephesus. A temple to Artimus was constructed that covered 100,000 square feet. It had 127 columns, each 60 feet high.

In Acts 19 the silversmiths in town started a riot because The Apostle Paul was pulling people away from Artimus worship. They were being hit in the pocketbook.

But it's interesting, they didn't sell images of Artimus. They sold little replicas of the temple.

Archeologists have found replicas of the temple from Spain to Syria. All over the Mediterranean world people worshipped Artimus, but the main focus was on the temple.

Here the Bible discloses something amazing. Believers in Jesus are a living temple not inhabited by some idol but indwelt by almighty God.

God took two groups of people who couldn't have been any more different and at odds with one another and brought them together through the cross.

If He's abolished the radical distinctions between them then He's done it for all of us.

How can there be love, forgiveness, unity, concern for one another in the home, in the church, in the neighborhood?

Jesus Christ has brought peace. He's brought reconciliation. He's given access to the Father. Believers are all part of the same body, the same family, and the same temple.

They're brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

How can any of us justify bitterness, resentment, antagonism, animosity? The answer is we really can't.

You say, 'Wait a minute Ed, you don't know what he's done to me. You don't know how she's spoken to me. You don't know how unfair they've been to me.'

Your right. I don't know what people have done to you. What I do know is what Jesus Christ died for you. I know about His sufferings, I know about His brokenness and humility.

I know about His agonizing death to purchase your forgiveness for the things you've said, thought, and done.

How dare any of be so arrogant as to refuse to forgive someone else when God was so willing to forgive us.

Who is it that you need to make things right with? Who is it that you need to call or go see this week and ask for forgiveness for your ungodly attitude toward them?

For He Himself is our peace who has made both one and broken down the middle wall of division between us.

Don't put the walls back up.