

EPHESIANS | At Home in the Household of God

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Introduction

Ephesians 2:11-22 (ESV)

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 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.

Intro:

- Just over 7 years ago I packed everything I owned into the backseat of my truck and drove almost 1000 miles to move from my hometown in Amarillo, TX to begin an internship in a middle school ministry at a church that looks like a barn in the middle of Leiper’s Fork, TN
 - Amarillo isn’t a big city...most of my friends were people I had known since elementary and middle school.
 - And my entire family lived in the area, and we got together often.
 - Amarillo was all I had ever known outside of attending to a discipleship ministry for 8 months...and in May of 2016, I took a step outside of the comfort and security of home to go on a journey to the Volunteer State with no clear end in sight, and no promise of return.
- Since living in Tennessee, I have fallen in love with this area and this church.
 - I met my wife here, we bought our first house here, we got our first dog here, and unless the Lord shows us differently, we believe that this is where He has called us to be.
 - But it hasn’t always felt like that...
 - Seven years ago, when I first moved here, being away from home was hard. Uprooting from everything and everyone I had ever known was hard.
- And while God used it for good in the end, at the beginning of my time here in TN I was homesick...for months.
 - Being homesick is a horrible feeling...that ache you get in your stomach...the pangs of nostalgia and the desire to just be in a place you belong...the physical and emotional fatigue it puts on you can be almost crushing at times.
 - Being away from home hurts...and this is a feeling that many of us have probably experienced before in relation to moving away from our family and into a new season of life.
 - But I don’t think this is the only time we experience homesickness.
- In 2020, when it felt like the world was falling apart and everything was a reference to a dumpster fire, I remember this same feeling coming back...the subtle nausea, the weight on my chest, the racing thoughts...and it was all connected to everything I was seeing on the news and in social media.
 - The death counts...the political turmoil...the racial tension...the hatred and bitterness that seemed to spew from every direction...
 - During that time, something in me knew, “It isn’t supposed to be like this.”
- Haven’t we all felt this before?

- We see the darkness of this world we live in and there seems to be this ache that comes from deep within our souls that longs for something more.
 - Or maybe we feel it in the opposite direction...maybe we have everything we could ever want.
 - We've got a great job, a great family, we don't have too many problems, plenty of money in the bank...but even then, there's this desire...a longing for something more.
- Whether we have everything, or we have nothing, we seem to find ourselves in a constant state of want that can't quite be satisfied...

“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim, well, there is such a thing as water. ...If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”¹

~ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

- What if the world we live in, as it currently is, is a rip off of the world we were made for?
 - What if that feeling of, “It shouldn't be this way” is, as the lead singer of Boston sang in 1976, ‘more than a feelin’”?

Separated by man

- We have all experienced this feeling of homesickness before
 - There is something in us that recognizes that the world is not as it should be, and if we're honest, we are homesick for the world we were created for.
 - Paul explores this concept in the second chapter of Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:11-12 (ESV)

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.

- You know when you go to interview for a job and you're filling out your resume? Usually, you want to put your best foot forward and try to remember all the things that would make you admirable in the eyes of the person who will either accept you or reject you.
 - Paul starts this out more like a roast than a resume...remember when you were separated, alienated, a stranger...gentiles in the flesh...unclean heathens...people without an ounce of hope and without God in the world...remember when the Jews used to call you mean names to talk about how unclean you are?
 - It's almost as if Paul is really trying to drive the pain point home...at one time you were completely broken and separated from God...
 - And not only that, you were separated from God's chosen people.

Ephesians 2:13-16 (ESV)

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 killing the hostility.

- Clearly in this passage, Paul is talking about the hostility that existed between the Jews and Gentiles, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that this is just a single example in all of humanity.

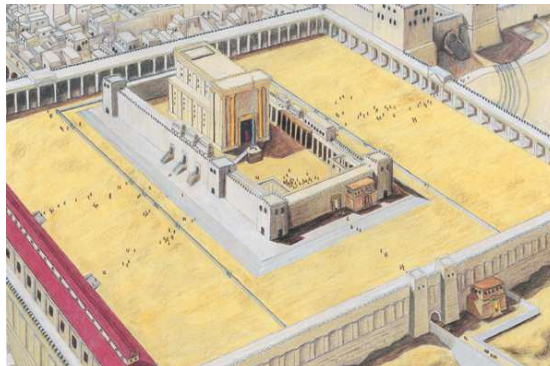
¹ C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins, Jun 2, 2009)

- The unfortunate reality that we've all seen in every news cycle, every political debate, and every cross-town school rivalry is that people hate each other...we live in a world of my tribe versus your tribe.
 - Our culture is obsessed with putting up dividing walls and increasing hostility.
 - You are either conservative or liberal...
 - You are either wealthy, upper class, middle class, or poor...
 - You're either public schooled or private schooled or home schooled...
 - You either like pineapple on pizza or hate it...
 - You either put the toilet paper roll right side up so the loose end is hanging over, or...you're just a monster.
- The Jews based their value on how superior they felt over the Gentiles.
 - But we all do the same thing...often without even realizing it, we compare ourselves with others to feel better about ourselves.
 - Notice how this played out for the Jews and Gentiles

Ephesians 2:14-15 (ESV)

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,

- Paul is saying that the Law was the thing that brought a wall of hostility between the Jews and Gentiles.
 - And this wall that he's referencing wasn't just a metaphorical division between people groups...it was a physical space in the Temple in first century Jerusalem.



- The temple was divided into different areas, and each area had a dividing border of some sort.
 - There was a gate that divided the Temple from the street. When you passed through the gate you would be in an area called the Outer Court.
 - Anyone was welcome in the Outer Court of the Temple. It was designed to be an area where the Gentile could see the majesty of God's Temple and see the privilege afforded His people.
 - When Jesus flipped the tables of the money changers in the gospel accounts...that happened in the outer court
- Any person passing through Jerusalem in that time was welcome to enter the outer court of the Temple...Jew or Gentile.
 - At the center of the Temple Mount, there was the Holy of Holies...this was the place where heaven and earth met.
 - This is where God's presence came into the human sphere and where the sins of the people would be atoned for.
 - But in between the place of God's presence and the outer court was an area called the inner court.
 - This was a place where only Jews were allowed...and there was a clear sign on the wall visible to anyone who wanted to get close to the Holy of Holies.
 - JEWS ONLY...if a gentile was caught in the inner court, he was to be punished by death.

- In the Temple there were three distinct places: the place where all men could enter, the place where God and man dwelt together, and, in between, an area where Gentiles could not go.
 - Paul is saying, “You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”
 - Christ has torn down this dividing wall, and He is now the way that all people come to access God.
- The Law was a gift God gave the Jews to show them God’s holiness and how God created mankind to live in relationship with Himself.
 - These people were supposed to be a blessing to the world, showing the gentiles who God was and what God was like.
 - But somewhere along the way, keeping the commands and ordinances became a weapon rather than a gift.
- Is there an area of your life where God has given you a gift that’s been used as a weapon?
 - The Jews depended on the law for their righteousness and used it as a mechanism to find men guilty.
 - Luke 18 *God thank you that I’m not like other people.*
 - They began to root their identity and esteem themselves higher than those who weren’t like them.
 - And this arrogant heart posture separated them from God as well...even though they were near to God in the inner court, their hearts were far from Him.
- Every single one of us...whether near or far...have tried to achieve our identity through comparing ourselves to other individuals and groups that aren’t like us.
 - If the Jews could use God’s gift of the Law as a dividing wall, then anything can become a dividing wall between us and loving other people.
 - But Jesus came and gave His life to literally destroy the hostility between God and people and reconcile us all to the relationship with God and one another that we were made for.

Jesus came to bring peace between God and man

Ephesians 2:17-18 (ESV)

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.

- The Jews and gentiles are just an example of what God has done for the human race. The reality is that the world is not as it should be...people are divided and hate each other...but Jesus came to bring peace between God and man.
 - When you start to follow Jesus, you realize that the Gospel makes a way to unify people who would have never been able to sit in the same room together in the first place.
 - The weapons of identity that we use to promote ourselves and devalue others become things that we don’t really care for anymore.
 - They become secondary issues to our identity in Christ.
 - It’s no longer about being the best party, class, or race.
 - As the late great Tim Keller once said, “You know there’s only one inferior race, right?... It’s the human race.”²
 - Jesus had no reason to associate Himself with a race of people like us...but He did...because He wasn’t ashamed of what it would do to His reputation if He gave up everything to serve and save those He loves.

Romans 5:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

² Timothy Keller. *The Reason for God* (Penguin Random House, 2018)

- Jesus made a way for us to come near to God and He is giving us the grace to become the kind of people we were made to be.
 - That feeling of homesickness that we walk through this life with...that feeling of “It shouldn’t be this way” isn’t the end of the story.
 - We can *actually* be at home in the safety and security that only Jesus can provide.
- When you find your home in God, you no longer need to live in hostility, because you are no longer a stranger in the Kingdom.

Identity in Christ

- If your identity is rooted in anything other than Jesus Christ and being a child of the King, living in His Kingdom — the byproduct is hostility, division, and dissatisfaction.
 - You might be asking yourself, “Why is that? Why are those things the fruit?”

Genesis 1:11 (ESV)

And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so.

- Apple trees don’t produce oranges...banana trees don’t produce grapes.
 - This is an order that God has created in the universe, and it is a reality in which we all live!
 - ***Who you are...what you believe about yourself at the core of your being determines everything you do and everyone you’re against.***
- See, when your identity is rooted in your ideology, anyone who thinks differently than you becomes an enemy.
 - When your identity is rooted in self-preservation and looking out for number one, your relationship with anyone who interrupts you or does better than you becomes hostile.
 - When your identity is rooted in how you measure up to those around you, you only associate with those who have value in the eyes of your culture, and you seek to ignore or look down on everyone else.
 - In short, when your identity is rooted in anything other than Jesus Christ, then anyone and everyone who isn’t like you becomes your enemy.
 - But when your identity is rooted in Jesus Christ you become the kind of person who can love and minister to anyone...even your enemies
 - So, the question is, are you a Politically Conservative person who goes to church, or a Christian who leans conservative?
 - Are you a businessman or woman who goes to church, or a Christian who seeks to follow Jesus in the way they lead their business?
 - Does your family associate with Christianity on Sundays, or is your family centered on Christ?
 - The fruit of identifying yourself in anything this world has to offer is hostility, division, and dissatisfaction — because you are identifying yourself by something you were never made for.
 - We all have a desire for something this world cannot provide, because this world, as it is, isn’t what we were made for!
 - We weren’t made for hostility, division...
 - We were made for Jesus.
 - When John wrote the book of Revelation after seeing what Heaven was going to look like, he said:

Revelation 7:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, 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, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

- This is what Heaven looks like...this is what the Kingdom looks like...

- And when you're at home in the Kingdom every dividing wall between our brothers and sisters comes crashing down
 - Because that's true, Paul concludes this section...

Citizens in God's kingdom

Eph. 2:19-22 (ESV)

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.

- Notice the relational progression that Paul ends with here...we are no longer strangers and aliens in the Kingdom...we are citizens, members of God's household, and joined together as stones.
 - Imagine three circles of a bullseye target that get more pointed with each example.
 - On the outer ring, in our relationship to God, we are no longer enemies... we are citizens in His Kingdom, and He is our King.
 - One ring in, we are no longer foreigners or even simply citizens...we are members of the family... we live in His house, and He is our Father.
 - And in the center — we are built together as a building. God doesn't just dwell with us... He lives in us.
- But notice that this isn't just about us as individuals with Jesus, as if no one else in the room matters...this letter was written to the CHURCH!
 - Paul intensifies the way we relate to God with each metaphor, but he also increases the definition of the relationship that we are supposed to have with fellow disciples.
 - Again, imagine the circles...
 - On the outer ring, in our relationship with other saints, we were far off, but now we're brought near as citizens in God's Kingdom, and these people are no longer enemies with differences...even if we disagree on something, these people are our neighbors.
 - Next ring in...
 - We aren't just neighbors in the same community... we are members of the same family... we live in our Father's house as brothers and sisters.
 - And in the center...we are meant to be built together... joined and cemented to one another as a building that God longs to dwell in.
 - How could someone feel unwelcomed or rejected if the church actually functioned like that?
 - Finding your home in the family of God is the antidote to the homesickness that we all feel for the Garden of Eden.
 - And each of these points drives that reality home...
 - We are God's temple...His dwelling place!
 - Think about what is happening right now in this room this morning! In what other place in this world do you have boomers, gen x, millennials, and gen z living together in unity?
 - Serving together, sharing life together, encouraging and celebrating one another. This is just a glimpse of what it looks like to live in the Kingdom!
 - I believe our students have the opportunity to make a difference in the world in front of them.
 - They aren't just the future of the church...they are the church!
 - And they need us to support them just like the bricks of a building support one another.
 - Do you pray for them? Do you serve them? Are you willing to do for them what the apostles and prophets and Christ Jesus Himself has done for us so that they may grow in their faith and love and hope in Christ?
 - If you don't, please start! It isn't too late! The harvest is ripe!

- To wrap up, I want you to see how Paul has drawn a contrast between ***who we once were*** and ***who we now*** are in this passage.
- To put it simply, you once were lost, but now, if you're willing to accept the amazing grace that God has extended toward you, you've been found...
 - ***And in Christ, you never have to be far from home again, because we have been brought near by the blood of Christ.***

Discussion Questions

1. Is there an ache in your soul for “something more”? Do you feel you were made for “another world”?
2. How do you experience “dividing walls” in your life? How have you experienced Jesus breaking down the dividing wall of hostility?
3. Have you ever tried to achieve your identity through comparing yourself to other individuals or groups? What is the difference when you accept and believe that Jesus came and gave his life to reconcile us to God *and* to one another?
4. What kind of fruit are you producing?
5. When you understand what the Kingdom of God really looks like — how does that impact how you relate to Christians who are not like you?

NOTES