

Ephesians 2:11-22 *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—<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <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. <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.*

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## **Announcements:**

1. Book Club: 7/14 5:30 Gentle & Lowly
2. First Friday, This Friday, join us.

## **Ephesians 2:11-22 | Far Off Brought Near**

I met one of my neighbors for the first time at the beginning of June. We live down by the Santa Fe arts district and first Fridays are a big deal in our neighborhood. There's no parking and people are everywhere. My neighbor recognized my car and saved a parking spot for me. His name is Isaiah and he just graduated high school, I know because of the sign his grandmother put in front of their house congratulating him. I introduced myself, and he did as well and for the next hour I listened to basically his life story. It wasn't 10 minutes into meeting him before depression, anxiety and loneliness were words he used to describe himself. Loneliness is in our hearts, perhaps our greatest loss is to be left out and abandoned. And this is precisely the position we are in outside of Christ.

### **1. Far Off**

*Ephesians 2:11 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—*

Paul is going to ask us to remember our former state of alienation before Christ entered our lives. And remember he is writing to the church in Ephesus which is a gentile city,

which means a city of non-jewish people. And this is the clearest picture of the social alienation that is demonstrated by our alienation from God. The Jews and Gentiles had nothing to do with one another. We'll get into more of that soon as Paul will lay out three particular features of our alienation. But, first you must notice the way in which Paul initially characterize this alienation.

He says remember Gentiles, you were called "the uncircumcision" by those who were called the circumcision, and this circumcision was *made in the flesh by hands*. Paul is here showing this jew gentile distinction to be ultimately only skin deep. It is not a distinction among humanity which God will honor, but in this way it is an archetypal example of the ways we divide ourselves up. If you listen closely you can hear the faint whisper of what Paul must be alluding to that could bring us back together, a circumcision made without hands.

Here is the problem with inclusion, it requires exclusion. Otherwise what are you being included into? A citizen of the world can't get their passport stamped. A family that includes everyone can't get together for meal. To see the divide between Jews and Gentiles as a problem of exclusion is to miss the real difficulty that making inclusion a central value implies. There are two pitfalls with a central value of inclusion and they usually hold hands, (1) Inclusion as a central value is vague and ineffectual. Remember at the beginning of the Pandemic, "we're all in this together." It is so total it doesn't really mean anything. (2) Alternatively inclusion as a central value becomes tyrannical. All imperialism is ultimately a quest for world peace and you arrive at that total unity by swallowing up or eliminating whatever lies outside your bounds.

In order to prevent these pitfalls, we need to remember the scope of our alienation and the solution to our alienation. And this will tell us the shape of the community God has called us into.

*Ephesians 2:12 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*

Paul does not live in a foolish world of total inclusion, he understands that in order for us to grasp our inclusion we need to remember how it is that we were excluded. Here Paul calls us to remember these three features of our corporate existence outside of Christ. Three types of alienation: from Christ, from the people of God, and from the promises of God.

1. **Alienated from Christ:** There is no hope of a savior. No conception of being able to draw close to God in a way in which we can know him and be known by him. We are

dead in our sins and not even able to clearly state what makes wrong wrong or right right. We are alienated from every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

2. **Alienated from God's people:** God had chosen Israel among all the nations of the world to make himself known, and told them of their unique relationship to him. One of the great privileges we have in the church is the opportunity to remind each other of our position in the Lord, but before this we had no one to turn to who can tell us we were in God's family.
3. **Alienated from God's Promises:** These last two are related. God gave his promises to this particular group of people. And the promise is that he will be their God and they will be his people.

These three aspects of alienation, Christ, people, promises amount to this brutal conclusion, that we must remember in order to grasp the fullness of our inclusion. We were without hope and without God. That is a life adrift at sea. No real direction, no real meaning, and no hope of ever being included without meaninglessness or tyranny.

## 2. Brought Near

*Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Paul repeats the pattern he established last week, but he expands it from an individual to a corporate perspective. Christ has brought us near by his blood. Even us gentiles who knew nothing of the promise of the messiah, can receive this Christ as our own. We are no longer alienated from the one who will unite all things in himself.

Look at how we are brought near. It is by Christ's blood that we are brought in. Here you see the dual nature of our rescue. We are atoned for in Christ, so that our sins no longer separate us from Christ. But we are also brought into the community of Christ because he was cut off. **We are no longer alienated from Christ.**

*Ephesians 2:14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility,*

**We are no longer alienated from God's people.** He has made us one together. It says that the dividing wall of hostility, between Jew and Gentile has been broken down. Now this is an actual wall around the temple in Jerusalem which had signs on it which read that if gentiles passed that wall they would be executed. There was a dividing wall. But this wall although still standing when Paul was writing this was already rendered obsolete. The Temple was open to the gentiles, there was no barrier between Jew and Greek in accessing God they both received access through Christ. Christ is peace between Jew and Gentile.

Ephesians 2:15-16 *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.*

**We are no longer separated from the covenant.** This is a strange verse, especially considering Jesus himself saying he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. But there is no contradiction merely alternative perspectives on the same event. The commandments and ordinances of Israel, in their cultic system of temple sacrifice, dietary and civil laws was fulfilled in Christ and therefore accountability towards these regulations on our behalf was abolished. But likewise, the moral law which we could not live up was fulfilled on our behalf in Christ, so that the guilt of the law is abolished in Christ.

In Christ we are made holy, and therefore do not seek to draw distinctions of holiness amongst ourselves, but rather find the whole of our atonement in Christ alone. This leads us to the type of people we are built up to become.

### 3. Built Up

Ephesians 2:17-18 *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.*

Christ accomplished this peace, and then he proclaimed it to us, through his word and through his church. We all, Jew and greek, the one true break in humanity have access in Christ to the Father by the Spirit. And this is how this new people begins to be formed, it is through the proclamation of Christ, the son of God who died to redeem a people to himself from all tribes nations and tongues. This is the circumcision or the dividing line of humanity that is made without hands.

This is the only hope of peace on earth, because we among ourselves cannot include without excluding, it is either meaningless or tyrannical. But Christ himself was cut out so that we might be brought in. Christ is the exclusion which includes us all. This means that our inclusion in Christ is meaningful, it is ultimate in its meaning. And it is never tyrannical, in fact it causes us to love our enemies. This creates a new type of community.

Ephesians 2:19-20 *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,*

Paul is always building. When you think you've seen greatness he next levels the situation. You were alienated from a commonwealth, but you are members now of the household of God. You weren't let into the kingdom you we're made royalty! And we the church are being built up into this particular shape based upon the scriptures with Christ as the cornerstone.

*Ephesians 2:21-22 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.*

Here is the purpose of true community, that God would dwell among us his people.