



Our New Humanity

Kicking It Off

What's a group, community, or club you felt like an outsider in before eventually belonging and what made the difference?

Read

Ephesians 2:11-22

Summary

We can get really good at doing church things, and somewhere along the way we forget that we didn't earn our way in. Paul addresses this head-on. Before he tells the Ephesian believers what to do, he tells them to remember. Remember that you were once completely outside. No access. No hope. Strangers to every promise God had ever made. That's a pretty uncomfortable thing to sit with, but Paul says it's important.

Why? Because if you forget where you came from, you start acting like you deserved to be here. And the moment that happens, you look at someone who's still a mess, still struggling, still outside, and instead of seeing yourself from a few years ago, you see someone who just needs to get their act together before they can belong. That's exactly backwards from how God operates.

Then Paul pulls a pivot. Two words: but now. Jesus came, and through His death He made peace. There was a wall between us and God, a real hostility rooted in our rebellion, and Jesus didn't just knock the wall down. He made peace between both sides. That's different. You can tear down a wall between two countries that are still at war and all you've done is clear the way for a battle. Jesus ended the war.

That same peace extends to how we treat each other. Jew and Gentile, in Paul's world. In ours? Generations, ethnicities, politics, you name it. We love to build walls between ourselves and people who are different from us. But the church is supposed to be the place where those walls come down because of what Jesus already did.

We go to people with good news, not a correction. The war is over. Come home.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Paul commands the Gentiles to "remember" their former condition before Christ as a first and fundamental act. What is a specific area of your life where remembering where you came from has shaped how you treat others?
3. It's easy to believe intellectually that we were saved by grace while still functionally living as if we've earned our place with God. What does that subtle entitlement look like in daily life, and how do you recognize it in yourself?
4. Paul distinguishes between breaking down a wall and making peace, arguing that walls fall all the time without real peace following. Where do you see people around you pursuing unity without any actual basis for it, and what does the church have to offer that the world doesn't?
5. The sermon named specific walls the church tends to build: generational, ethnic, political, cultural. Which of those feels most real or most challenging in your own experience of Christian community?
6. If the gospel is genuinely good news, a celebration that the war is over, how would that change the posture you bring when sharing your faith with someone who has been hurt by the church or has walked away from it?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"If you do not remember that you were grafted into the covenants of God, if you do not remember that you came from a life of sin and brokenness, then you will begin to think that it was your work, that it was what you have done, that has caused you to be blessed by God and caused you into the family."

"Jesus was not in the business of just tearing down the wall. He is tearing down the wall by bringing peace between both sides. Jesus gives us peace to God the Father."

"Your salvation was not built by you. It was not because of your hard work, your sinless life. The 'but now' has nothing to do with what we've done. The 'but now' is because Jesus came into the picture."

"If someone comes with a drug addiction, do they need to solve their drug addiction before they come to meet Jesus? They have full access to the God of peace, the Prince of Peace, who can bring peace in their life."

Sermon Notes*Ephesians 2:11-22*

*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.*

Outline

1. Remember Where You Were (vv. 11-12)

- a. Paul commands Gentile believers to remember, not act, first
- b. They were separated from Christ, alienated from Israel's commonwealth, strangers to the covenants of promise
- c. No hope. Without God in the world.
- d. The command to remember defeats entitlement and produces humility
- e. You were not born into this; it was not your right

2. But Now: Christ Has Changed Everything (vv. 13-18)

- a. "But now" signals a total reversal — something new has entered history
- b. Those once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (v. 13)
- c. He Himself is our peace — not just its proclaimer but its source (v. 14)
- d. He abolished the law of ordinances, making one new man in place of the two (vv. 15-16)
- e. The wall of hostility is not just broken down, it is killed — peace is made, not just declared (v. 16)
- f. Both Jews and Gentiles now have access to the Father through one Spirit (v. 18)
- g. Peace runs in two directions: between us and God, and between us and one another

3. You Are No Longer Strangers (vv. 19-22)

- a. Fellow citizens of God's kingdom — political language: you belong to His rule
- b. Members of the household of God — familial language: you belong to His family
- c. Built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Christ as cornerstone
- d. The whole structure grows into a holy temple — God dwelling in His people together
- e. The church's diversity is not a social project; it is the visible sign of Christ's peace

Notes

There is a temptation, in any community shaped by shared convictions, to mistake familiarity with God for proximity to God. The danger is subtle. You learn the language. You show up. You sing the songs and attend the studies and do the things that mark you as someone who belongs. And somewhere in the accumulation of all that activity, you begin to feel, not consciously but functionally, that you have earned your place. Paul writes to the Ephesians, and through them to us, to dismantle that assumption entirely.

The passage is Ephesians 2:11-22, and Paul opens it with a command that might seem strange: remember. Not "do." Not "go." Remember. The Gentile believers in Ephesus are being asked to recall who they were before Christ came into the picture. "At that time," Paul writes, they were "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." That is a severe description. Total exclusion. No Messiah, no covenant, no hope, no God. Not marginally disadvantaged, but categorically outside.

The command to remember is not an exercise in self-pity. Paul is not asking these believers to feel bad about where they came from. He is asking them to feel something far more useful: humility. Because the moment you forget that you were once outside, you begin to believe that you were always inside. And the moment you believe that, you start operating as if your position before God is something you have maintained rather than something you have received. The Gentile believers were not born into covenant. They had no ancestral claim. They were, as Paul puts it, the uncircumcision, and the reminder of that is not meant to sting but to clarify. Grace was given to people who had no reason to expect it.

This matters practically because of what forgetfulness produces. When people forget that they were once dead in sin, separated from the promises of God, they begin to interact with those who are still outside the faith from a posture of superiority rather than solidarity. They see someone struggling with addiction, or someone living in obvious sin, and the instinct becomes correction rather than empathy. The message becomes: fix yourself, and then you can belong. Or, in its softer but equally distorted form: you can belong no matter what you do, so there is no need to change at all. Both responses miss the point. Both reveal that something has gone wrong in how the person understands their own story.

Then Paul pivots on two words that carry enormous weight: but now. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." The "but now" is a reversal. Something has happened in history that changes everything. God, in the person of Jesus, crossed the distance that humanity could not cross on its own. The initiative was entirely His. The Gentiles did not draw near to God. God, through

Christ, drew them near. The blood of Jesus is the mechanism, the cost of that movement, the price paid so that those who were far off could be brought close.

Paul describes what this accomplishes in two directions. First, it creates peace between humanity and God. The language of hostility is stark and deliberate. There was a wall, a dividing wall of hostility, and it stood between those who were inside the covenant and those who were not. But the deeper hostility was between humanity and God, the enmity produced by sin. Jesus did not simply tear down a barrier. He made peace. And that distinction matters because walls come down all the time without peace following. Two countries at war can demolish a border wall and still be at war. The wall is a symptom of the conflict, not the conflict itself. Jesus addressed the conflict at its root. By His death, He absorbed the hostility and produced something genuinely new, not just the absence of war but the presence of peace.

Second, the peace Jesus made extends horizontally, between people who were formerly divided. The Jew and the Gentile, the circumcision and the uncircumcision, are brought into what Paul calls "one new man." The old categories are not just subordinated. They are transcended. There is a new humanity forming, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone, growing into a holy temple where God dwells by His Spirit. The church is the place where this new humanity is meant to be visible.

This is where the sermon becomes unavoidably contemporary. The walls that separated Jew from Gentile in Paul's world take new forms in ours. Generational suspicion. Ethnic distance. Political tribalism. Cultural preference. The human impulse to gather with people who look like us, think like us, vote like us, speak like us is extraordinarily strong. And the church has not been immune to it. If anything, the church has sometimes sanctified those divisions, dressing them in theological language or institutional habit.

But Paul's logic cuts against all of it. If Christ has made peace between humanity and God, and if that same peace is meant to characterize the relationships within His church, then the walls we build between ourselves are a direct contradiction of the gospel we claim to believe. You cannot preach the peace of Christ on Sunday and maintain walls of hostility Monday through Saturday. The two are incompatible.

The answer is not a naive optimism that ignores real difference or pretends conflict does not exist. Tearing down walls without peace is not reconciliation; it is just a different kind of disorder. Artificial diversity, diversity pursued as a social project without any underlying basis for unity, cannot hold. What the church offers is something the world cannot manufacture: a genuine, durable basis for unity in the person of Jesus Christ. People who have been brought near by His blood share something that outweighs

every difference. They have the same Savior. They have been recipients of the same grace. They were all, at one point, far off.

That shared identity is the foundation for everything Paul describes in the closing verses of the passage. "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." Two images: political and familial. Citizens of the same kingdom. Members of the same family. Both imply belonging. Both imply obligation. You do not get to be a citizen of God's kingdom only in the parts you find comfortable, and you do not get to be a member of His household only with the relatives you naturally like.

The practical implication is this: evangelism, when it is rooted in this understanding, looks less like a prosecution and more like a celebration. The gospel is not primarily a warning about what happens if you stay outside. It is an announcement that the war is over, that peace has been made, that the one who had every right to be your enemy gave up His own Son so that you could come home. When the church carries that message to the world, it carries it with the memory of having been far off itself. Not with a posture of superiority, but with the posture of someone who was shown mercy and cannot stop talking about it.

The called-out church is not a community of people who have gotten their lives together. It is a community of people who remember where they came from, who they were without Christ, and what it cost for the distance to be closed. That memory produces humility. That humility produces empathy. And that empathy is precisely what a watching world needs to see before it will believe the news is actually good.

Blog

Paul begins Ephesians 2:11 with a command to "remember." He wants the Gentile Christians in Ephesus to pause and recall who they were before Christ. The command is pastoral not trying to be judgmental. People who forget where they came from take for granted what they have been given. Remembering is the foundation for everything that follows.

They are asked to remember their exclusion. Five layers of exclusion stack up in verse 12: separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. The Gentiles had no standing before God. No covenant, no promise, no access, no hope. They were godless in the structural sense, exiled from the entire architecture of relationship with God. The ancient world, both physical and spiritual, said clearly: this is not for you.

The Jerusalem temple had a wall separating the Court of the Gentiles from the inner courts where God's presence dwelt. A stone inscription on that wall read: "No foreigner may enter within the balustrade and partition wall around the temple. Whoever is caught will be responsible for his own death which will follow." The wall communicated what the covenant communicated: there is an inside, and you are on the outside.

Paul is setting up the greatest reversal in human history.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (verse 13). The structure of verse 13 mirrors the structure of verse 4. Both begin with an adversative that interrupts the description of hopeless condition and announces divine action. "But God" in verse 4. "But now in Christ" in verse 13. The pivot is always external. The change arrives from outside the condition.

The mechanism in which we are granted this new condition is important. "Brought near by the blood of Christ." The distance between the Gentiles and God closed by a death. This is where Christianity parts ways with every other account of reconciliation. Other frameworks assume that parties that have gone their separate ways, given enough time and goodwill and effort, can find their way back to one another. Paul's account says the gap was unbridgeable from the human side. The cross crossed it.

Paul then writes one of the most compressed and powerful christological statements in all his letters: "For he himself is our peace" (v. 14). Christ does more than make peace and announce peace, though He does both. He is the peace. The reconciliation is a union accomplished in His person. Jew and Gentile both stand in Him, and in Him the categories collapse.

The "dividing wall of hostility" Christ abolished was real on multiple levels. The temple wall was one expression of a system of ordinances and distinctions that structured the ancient world. Israel's law created clean and unclean categories, practices

that separated the covenant people from the nations. These categories were God-given, and they served their purpose. That purpose was always temporary, pointing forward to a unity they themselves could not produce. When Christ fulfilled the law and absorbed its condemnation on the cross, He dismantled the structural logic of separation. The boundary markers that had kept the nations at arm's length were abolished, so that "one new man" could be created in their place (v. 15).

This phrase, "one new man," deserves to sit for a moment. Christ created a new category. A third thing. A new humanity that did not exist before the cross. The reconciliation is generative. Something is made that was not there before.

The reconciliation runs in two directions simultaneously. Verse 16: "that he might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." The cross deals with two estrangements at once. Horizontal reconciliation with each other and vertical reconciliation with God happen in the same place, at the same time, through the same death. A person who claims peace with God while maintaining hostility toward a brother or sister has misunderstood what the cross accomplished.

The access that results is shared and equal. "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (v. 18). The trinitarian structure here is deliberate: through the Son, by the Spirit, to the Father. Both groups, Jew and Gentile, approach by the same route and arrive at the same place. There is no special VIP entrance. The cross leveled the ground completely.

Verses 19 through 22 then describe what this new community looks like from the inside. "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens." The language of verse 12 is directly reversed. Every element of exclusion named at the beginning is answered by an element of inclusion at the end. The stranger is now a fellow citizen. The one outside the household is now a member of it.

Two images carry the description of the new community: political and familial. Fellow citizens and members of the household. Both images communicate permanence and belonging. You are not visiting. You are not on probation. You belong here, because you were made to belong here, by the same sovereign who designed the belonging.

The building metaphor in verses 20 through 22 extends the image further. The community is a structure, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. The cornerstone in ancient construction was the first stone laid and the most critical. It determined the alignment of everything that followed. All other stones were measured and positioned in relation to it. A true cornerstone makes a true building possible. A faulty one cannot be compensated for anywhere else in the structure.

The building is still under construction. Paul uses a present-tense verb: the structure "grows" into a holy temple in the Lord. The church is a living thing still being built. The

destination is precise: a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (v. 22). The temple in Jerusalem was where God's presence dwelt among His people. The church now carries that function. A people, joined together stone by stone, becoming the place where God makes His home.

This week's passage challenges the instinct to build walls, and that instinct is strong. The same impulse that made the temple wall plausible makes every other form of sorting plausible: political, economic, cultural, ethnic, generational. The walls feel natural because they reflect real differences. Differences are real. The cross has made them irrelevant to the question of belonging. The church is the community where the wall has been demolished. To rebuild it, in any form, contradicts the cross.