

We live in the age of expressive individualism. It is the air we breathe, but W society has been individualistic since the Enlightenment. Really, individualism started in Genesis 3. We tend to focus on the self. Augustine defined sin as being curved in on the self. And it stays with us. The Bible calls it the flesh. So we even read the Bible with individualist eyes when very little in the Bible has to do with isolated individuals. It is a communal book meant for corporate formation. 98% of the “yous” are “y’all’s.”

To quote NT scholar Joseph Hellerman, “salvation is a community-creating event.”¹ He goes on to point out that the NT uses the word “savior” 23 times, only one of those is used of an individual person. Every other time it is used of Christ as savior of a group or collective entity. And when Paul uses a pronoun with the word “Lord,” 53 times it is “our” Lord and only once is it “my” Lord.² As we near the end of our series on the cross, this morning I want you to see that the cross creates a community.

God’s goal has always been to govern the world through humanity. He begins in Genesis 1:2, 26-28. Fall, Israel: Exod 19 (Deut 30:1-8), 2nd Fall, **Jer 31:31-34, Ezek 36:22-28** (11:17-20, 37:21-28)

Jesus, the faithful human One, the son of man, ushers in a new covenant by his death. We celebrated that last week with communion. Jesus says this is the NC in my blood (1 Cor 11:23-25). The cross inaugurates the NC, which produces a NC people, a New Israel, a New Humanity.

Now, I want to anchor down in Eph 2, but to appreciate this passage and indeed to appreciate the Bible we have to understand the great divide of the ancient world: Jews and Gentiles. They hated one another. Jews thought Gentiles were inferior creatures, ritually unclean, scum of the earth. Gentiles blamed Jews for everything that went wrong in their lives because Jews refused to worship the gods.

Plato is one of the most influential thinkers in history. In the 4th C BC, he taught that people are born into ranks or classes due to the will of the gods. Nothing you can do about it and no way to change it. Of course, Plato learned his fateful view of humanity from his teacher Socrates, who was famous for saying this blessing: “I am grateful to Fortune for three things; first, that I was born a human being, not a beast; secondly, that I was born a man, not a woman; thirdly, that I was born a Greek, not a barbarian.”³ Notice the fragmentation: Greek men thanked the gods for their blessing and snubbed their nose at those of lesser status: beasts, women, and non-Greeks.

¹ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 124. On 131, he writes, “The death of Jesus is a community-creating event.”

² 124-125, 177.

³ Hermippus of Smyrna, fragment 13.

At the time of Jesus, Jewish men adapted the pagan prayer of Socrates. They would thank God for three blessings each morning, thanking God “who did not make me a gentile; who did not make me a woman; who did not make me an ignoramous.” A little later, Rabbi Ya’akov amended the final blessing to be “who did not make me a slave.”⁴ The pagan prayer had become the prayer of God’s people, dividing humanity up by race, class, and gender. So the world was divided between two main groups: Jews and Gentiles, Jews and non-Jews. Jews despised non-Jewish gentiles and gentiles felt the same way. Jews called Gentiles “dogs.” Jews of Jesus day said God only created Gentiles to fuel the fires of hell. A Jew couldn’t even help a Gentile woman giving birth because that would be aiding in the addition of Gentiles in the world.⁵ The appropriate word is *hostility*.

You could imagine the challenges when Jesus saves both Jews and Gentiles and call them together. That’s why we have Acts 15 and the whole books of Galatians and Romans. Turn to Eph 2:11-22 [917]: This is . . . Three points: 1) Remember your past: know who you were, 2) Realize your present: know what Christ did, and 3) Realize your present part 2: realize who you are now.

I. Remember Your Past: Know who you Were 11-12. He mentions a list of characteristics of our life apart from Christ. And really, all six have to do with the fact that we are Gentiles. None of us deserve any of the blessings of Christ because of our sin. The vast majority of this room do not deserve the blessings of Christ because we are Gentiles.

Think about that. God didn’t have to include Gentiles. He chose Abraham and he could have only chose Abraham and never promised to bless the Gentiles. He didn’t have to do that. Jews would dismiss Gentiles as “*the uncircumcision*.” Circumcision marked out the people of God so Gentiles were dismissed as nobodies.⁶

He says we were *without Christ*. We were without the Messiah, without the Savior King. Look over at **1:3**. Okay, if every blessing the Spirit gives is found in Christ, if we are without Christ we are without every spiritual blessing. Which means we have no spiritual blessing. But it’s even worse than that. Not only do we lack every blessing, we gain curse because of our sin.

He calls us *aliens from the citizenship of Israel*. The NIV says “excluded from citizenship in Israel.” You were not part of Israel. You were excluded from the people of God. You were a foreigner. You didn’t belong. You were an unwelcome outsider and outcast.

We were *strangers to the covenants of promise*. You see, God had made covenants with his people. With Abraham to bless his family and through him bless the world. To David, to have a

⁴ Rabbi Meir, in the Mishnah. Menachot 43b.

⁵ Hughes, *Ephesians*, 87.

⁶ Notice what Paul says about circumcision here though. It is “made in the flesh by hands.” Them’s “fighting words.” This phrase was used all over the OT to refer to idols! An idol is “made by hands” (Lev 26:1, 30, Isa 2:18, Dan 5:4 LXX).

Son who would rule over an eternal Kingdom. The NC that promised full and final forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We were *without hope*. Hopeless helpless doomed and damned. No hope. Nothing beyond the grave. Nothing beyond your inevitable death that will rob you of everything you are and have.

We were *without God*. The Greek word is *atheos*. Since we were excluded from his people, we were excluded from *him!* / That is who we were before the cross of Christ and God wants us to remember that. Don't forget. Verse 11: remember! **2:1-3**

All over the place in the Old Testament, God calls his people to *remember* where they were before God's gracious intervention. In Deuteronomy, Moses says "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (Deut 5:15, 15:15, 16:12, 24:18, 22).

Why does God want us to remember who we were before Christ? So we will respond rightly and he will receive the praise he is do. **(1:3ff)**. / Know who you were

II. Realize Your Present: Know What Jesus Did 13-18. But now. Remember who you were. Uncircumcision, without the Messiah, aliens from Israel, strangers to the promises, without hope and without God, *but now*. I like big buts and I cannot lie. So does Paul: **2:5**. But God. Two of the most wonderful words in all the Scripture. They change everything. Suffering saint, when you find yourself wallowing in the wilderness remind yourself: but God. But God. No matter how dark the reality, but God. You may be at the end of your rope, but God. Can't go another day, but God. He makes a way when there was no way.

But now *in Christ*. Union with Christ. No longer in Adam but now in Christ. We have been united to Jesus through faith. Remember 1:3? Blessed *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing. Listen to what all Jesus has done for us in these verses:

Jesus brought us near. You were once far off, but Jesus brought us near. Outsider brought inside. How? By the blood of Christ. How are Gentiles brought near? Through the cross of Christ.

Jesus made us one – **14**. Jews and Gentiles – one in Christ. Gal 3:28 says the same thing in a single verse: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This verse became a baptismal liturgy for the early church. No more divisions based on race, class, gender, generation.⁷ All one in Christ through faith. One NT scholar writes, "Christ has transcended one of the fundamental divisions of the first-century world."⁸ As one secular historian put it, "The fabric of things was rent, a new

⁷ KV, 179.

⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 141.

order of time had come into existence, and all that previously had served to separate people was now, as a consequence, dissolved.”⁹

Jesus tore down the wall of hostility. What is that? Well, we see in the next verse it is the law, but I think Paul is also thinking of the divisions around the temple. You had the holy place, Priest’s court, court of Israel, Women’s courtyard, then the court of the Gentiles. And it was elevated. The Holy of Holies was the highest point. So, priests could go the highest and down from there: Israelite men, then Israelite women, then Gentiles.¹⁰ There was elevation, but also walls and warning signs in both Greek and Latin. The inscription says, “no foreigners shall enter.”¹¹ “No man of another race is to enter within the fence and enclosure around the Temple. Whoever is caught will have only himself to thank for the death which follows.”¹²

Gentiles could not get near the presence of God. They were excluded. The irony is that God’s presence wasn’t even in that Second Temple. Remember, the Ark of the Covenant was lost after the destruction of the first Temple and Ezekiel saw the presence of God leave and never return. So they had layer after layer, walls, signs, and the Holy of Holies was empty.

How did Jesus break down the wall of hostility? You see those three words in verse 14?: “In his flesh.” Through the cross of Christ, Jesus removed horizontal hostility. As Sinclair Ferguson put it, “The death of Christ effected the divine de-consecration of the Jerusalem temple, signaling its ultimate destruction in AD 70.”¹³ First he cleans it out, then he tears down the curtain, and in AD 70 he tore down the walls.

What else did Jesus do for us? *Jesus abolished the Law 15.* By abolishing the OC law, nullifying the law, making the law of no effect.¹⁴ He is talking about the Law of Moses. Jesus set it aside. Rom 10:4: “Christ is the culmination of the law.” It all pointed to him, is fulfilled in him, and set aside by him. The Law of Moses with its commands was a major barrier between Jews and Gentiles and Jesus ended the OC system. We are now dead to the Law, freed from it. We’ve been moved from the old age to the new age, transferred from the domain of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son.

Jesus created a new humanity. The word is literally one new man, which is clearly Jesus, but he is the new Adam who represents a new humanity. This is the church. The Jew + Gentile community of Christ. God plans to unite all things in Christ and he begins by uniting a people

⁹ *Dominion*, 87.

¹⁰ <https://discoverhistoricjesus.com/destruction-of-herods-temple/> ; <https://nearemmaus.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/herodsinnertemple.jpg>

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_warning_inscription#/media/File:Samuel_and_Saidye_Bronfman_Archaeology_WingDSCN5007.JPG

¹² Cohick, 184.

¹³ Ferguson, *Ephesians*, 61.

¹⁴ O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 197.

around him. We are the sign of the coming Kingdom, the instrument of the coming Kingdom, and a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. **1:10, 3:9-11**. In this new humanity we have the reunion of the human race in the present, an advance sign of new creation. We are the people of God's future living in the present.

He *created* one new humanity out of the two.¹⁵ This is new creation language. Nothing less than a new creation, an entirely new entity, was needed to transcend the deep rift between Jews and Gentiles. This unified new humanity is a preview of the world to come. Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ. God is summing up all things in Christ, overcoming a fractured humanity in a fractured world.

Jesus made peace. "So making peace." The absence of hostility and the presence of a relationship of love, loyalty, and faithfulness. *Shalōm*. The life of the age to come brought into the present.

Jesus reconciles us both to God in one body. How? **16**. "Through the cross." The cross brings Jews and Gentiles into one body. Gal 3:13-14: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith." The blood of Jesus creates a unified community. No longer two but one. Col 3:11: "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all."

Jesus killed the hostility. From hostility to family. To be reconciled to God is to be reconciled to one another. / *Jesus preached peace* **17**.¹⁶ Isn't it interesting that he says Jesus preached? Jesus never went to Ephesus – but the voice of the Good Shepherd comes through under shepherds. And Jesus offers peace to those far off and near. His invitation is extensive. Friend, don't you want peace with God and peace with one another? Jesus offers it to you. It is yours for the taking.

Jesus granted us access **18**. Notice the Trinity at work: Through the son we have access in one Spirit to the Father. Before, we couldn't pass the wall marking off the court of the Gentiles or we'd risk death, and now we have access. Child-like access to the Father. TK: "Only a child wakes up a king at 3am for a drink of water. We have that kind of access!" Even we Gentiles can approach the throne of grace boldly because of the work of Christ on our behalf.

No longer exiled and excluded but brought near and welcomed. Therefore, we welcome. Rom 15:5-7:

"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for

¹⁵ Stott, *Ephesians*, 101.

¹⁶ Isa 52:7 53:5 57:19 54:13 56:3-8

the glory of God.” / Dearly beloved, realize your present: know what Jesus did for you. Oh, so much.

III. Realize Your Present: Know Who You Are 19-22. We are now *fellow citizens* of Israel. We are *members of the household of God*. We’re in the house, in the family. The gospel in verses 19-22 reverse the plight of verses 2:11-12. You are no longer foreigners. You are no longer strangers and aliens but now citizens and saints. We are now fellow citizens and members of the household of God. Gentiles are now a part of God’s people. Before Christ we were alienated from *citizenship* in Israel (2:12), but now we are fellow *citizens*. You Gentiles are now citizens of Israel. Citizens share responsibility, rights, and benefits. To use Peter’s language, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people.” (1 Pet 2:10). You are not visitors, you are not temporary residents, but full citizens.

Before Christ, we were strangers to the covenants, foreigners to the promises, without hope, without God but in Christ we have been brought near, he has made us both one, no more hostility, one new humanity, reconciled, with access to the Father, fellow citizens of Israel, members of the household of God.

Not only that! Verse 21-22 say this new humanity is also a *temple*.¹⁷ We are a structure that is being built into God’s dwelling place by the Spirit. The temple grows as people become part of this new humanity. We are the presence of God on earth, the body of Christ. God is summing up all things in the Messiah through the church. We are God’s address on earth – **1:21-23, 4:10**. The cross accomplishes God’s cosmic purposes.

And Jesus is the cornerstone. The cornerstone calibrates the whole structure. All else is aligned according to that stone. That’s true of the church and needs to be true of your life. Jesus is your cornerstone.

The cross created a community, a NC people. Titus 2:14: Jesus “gave himself for *us* to redeem *us* from all lawlessness and to purify for himself *a people* for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” So, Hellerman says we should add “familification” to our terms of salvation:¹⁸ election, regeneration, conversion, justification, familification, sanctification. He writes, “It is time to inform our people that conversion to Christ involves both our *justification* and our *familification*, that we gain a new Father *and* a new set of brothers and sisters when we respond to the gospel. It is time to communicate the biblical reality that personal salvation is a community-creating event, and to trust God to change our lives and the lives of our churches accordingly.”¹⁹

¹⁷ 1 Chron 23:1-4 Isa 56:6-7 Ezek 37:26-28 1 Cor 3:16-17 2 Cor 6:16; 1:22-23

¹⁸ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 132.

¹⁹ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 143.

What does this mean for us? Glory in the cross for its horizontal elements. Christ purchases a people. / A people unified around Jesus. You notice the emphasis on unity: 14: made us both one, 15 one new man, 16 both now one body 18 one spirit. All barriers broken down by the blood. The arms of Jesus are spread open wide. And we are called to guard and pursue unity: 4:1-6. This was Jesus' dying wish, in his final prayer. Jn 17:20-21: "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

As Jesus is heading to the cross to create this unified community, he prays for our unity.

Michael Gorman writes, "Christ's death effected the new covenant, meaning specifically the creation of a covenant community of forgiven and reconciled disciples, inhabited and empowered by the Spirit to embody a new-covenant spirituality of cruciform loyalty to God and love for others, thereby peaceably participating in the life of God and in God's forgiving, reconciling, and covenanting mission to the world."²⁰

Benediction: Now the Savior, Christ Jesus the Lord, who replaces hostility with peace, who makes the two One, who creates the New Humanity, grant you joy in his presence this day and every day.

²⁰ Michael Gorman, *The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 75.