

Humanity is fractured. America is a divided nation. People are polarized seemingly like never before. Covid, covid responses, vaccines. Too many are disciplined by cable news, being formed by their favorite talking heads filling the echo chamber with familiar propaganda and hot takes. Even in the Christian world. Cancel culture has invaded the church. Social media with its algorithms reinforces the echo chambers and elevate our anxieties about those unlike us and confirm our presuppositions and feed self-righteousness and a mindset of superiority over those unlike us.

George Floyd revealed how our country is still fractured by race. In many ways, nothing new, just exposed. One time a bishop in Australia used to drive a bus with white kids and what they then called aborigines. The black kids and white kids were constantly squabbling and he finally got tired of it and put his foot down and said the only kids allowed on my bus are green kids. If you are on, you are green. They needed the ride so they all agreed to be green. He'd ask, what color are you? White. No, green. Okay. Problem solved, until a couple miles down the road, a boy in the back shouted out, "All right, light green on this side, dark green on that side."¹ Even in the church. MLK was right: "At 11 a.m. Sunday morning . . . we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation."

And then we tend to elevate secondary and tertiary doctrinal matters to the level of primary. In 2005, the following won the funniest religious joke award: I was walking across a bridge one day, and I saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump. I ran over and said: "Stop. Don't do it." "Why shouldn't I?" he asked. "Well, there's so much to live for!" "Like what?" "Are you religious?" He said: "Yes." I said: "Me too. Are you Christian or Buddhist?" "Christian." "Me too. Are you Catholic or Protestant?" "Protestant." "Me too. Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?" "Baptist." "Wow. Me too. Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?" "Baptist Church of God." "Me too. Are you original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?" "Reformed Baptist Church of God." "Me too. Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?" He said: "Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915." I said: "Die, heretic scum," and pushed him off."²

Today, humanity fractured, but really, it has always been that way. It is one of the fundamental problems with us! Plato is one of the most influential thinkers in history. In the 4th C BC, Plato 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.

This was the cultural norm and sadly, this thinking infiltrated the people of God over time. 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 ignoramus." 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

¹ Hughes, 91.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/sep/26/religion.world>

³ Hermippus of Smyrna, fragment 13.

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

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*.

The temple at the time of Jesus reflected this distinction as well. It was built with divisions. 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. Here’s a couple (2 PICS).⁶ There was elevation, but also walls and warning signs in both Greek and Latin. Look at this inscription: it says, “no foreigners shall enter.” PIC.⁷ “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.”⁸ 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. What did Jesus say? “Your house is abandoned desolate” (NLT).

Enter: the Messiah. King Jesus died to create one unified people, a new covenant community centered on Him (Jn 1:11-13). The King came to unite a fractured humanity in Him. He brings Jews and Gentiles around Him into a new people. He unites what was divided. We are going to look at Eph 2, but 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.⁹ All one in Christ through faith. One NT scholar writes, “Christ has transcended one of the fundamental divisions of the first-century world.”¹⁰ As one secular historian put it, “The fabric of things was rent, a new order of time had come into existence, and all that previously had served to separate people was now, as a consequence, dissolved.”¹¹

Turn to the book of Ephesians: **2:11-22 (917)**. I want us to look at where we were before Christ and where we are because of Christ, and what we are becoming in Christ.

I. Where We Were before Christ – 2:11-12 – Remember! Here, we have the first command of the letter and it is to remember who you were before Christ. 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). Remember.

It is not that we actually forget, but we wouldn’t appropriately appreciate the grace of Christ without first reflecting on our state before Christ. So God regularly calls us to recall and remember our former state before Christ because without seeing the depth of our depravity we will wander from the grandeur of grace. The brightness of the diamond pops best against the backdrop of the black velvet.

⁵ Hughes, *Ephesians*, 87.

⁶ <https://discoverhistoricjesus.com/destruction-of-herods-temple/> ; <https://nearemmaus.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/herodsinnertemple.jpg>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_Warning_inscription#/media/File:Samuel_and_Saidye_Bronfman_Archaeology_WingDSCN5007.JPG

⁸ Cohick, 184.

⁹ KV, 179.

¹⁰ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 141.

¹¹ *Dominion*, 87.

Paul is writing to the Gentiles, the pagans, the nations, the non-Jews who were dismissed as the “uncircumcision.” That’s weird, right? But remember that circumcision was what literally marked off the people of God as the people of God. In their world, to be uncircumcised was to be cursed by God. To be circumcised was to have the favor of God. Now, don’t ask me how they checked but it was a big deal.

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). / Then Paul lays out 5 problems we had as Gentiles that he wants us to remember: **12.**

1. We were separated from Christ – Christ means King. And specifically, the Jewish King. As Gentiles, we were separate. And without Christ, we have nothing. 1:3. No Christ – not spiritual blessing whatsoever.
2. We were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel – NIV: excluded from citizenship in Israel. As Gentiles, we were not part of the covenant community. In other words, we were not included in the people of God.
3. We were strangers to the covenants of promise – We were foreigners. A covenant is a commitment and Scripture has several: the covenants with Noah, Abr, the OC, David (Rom 9:4-5).
4. We had no hope. No real reason to live.
5. We were without God (*athēos*) in the world - Without God, there is no hope. Life is only about getting the most out of this measly 85 years (or less!). No ultimate purpose or life beyond this life. I wonder, do you feel that way this morning? What are you living for? What is your purpose in life? Do you have hope? You ultimately can’t have hope or purpose without having God. / That’s where we were before Christ and the NC.

II. Where We Are because of Christ – 13. This is a big “but.” This is Paul’s Sir Mix a Lot moment. He likes big butts. He did the same thing earlier **2:1-4a**. We were far off from Christ, far off from the commonwealth of Israel, far off from the covenants but now have been brought near. How? *By* the blood of Christ shed on the cross. Gentiles have been brought near through the crucifixion of the Son of God. We often neglect this aspect of the gospel. If I were to ask, why did Jesus die? We would all rightly answer: to forgive us our sin, but here the purpose of the cross is to bring Gentiles in. Most all of us are Gentiles so this is really good news. 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 community.

2:14 – Who is Christ? What did he do? How did he do it? He is our peace. The Prince of peace. What did he do? He made Jews and Gentiles one. How? Through his flesh, through his broken body he has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. Remember that wall in the temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts with the warning that said Gentiles would be responsible for their own death if they entered past the wall? That one. Jesus tore it down, through the cross. Remember in the gospels, when Jesus died, the curtain in the temple that protected the most holy place was torn, from top to bottom (Luke 23:45). Jesus is building a new temple with no walls. 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.”¹²

¹² Ferguson, *Ephesians*, 61.

Jesus tore down the wall *of hostility*. The separation in the temple was a symbol of the division and hostility between Jews and Gentiles. We have a hard time appreciating how big of a deal this was. One NT scholar writes, “Christ has transcended one of the fundamental divisions of the first-century world.”¹³ Here we learn that Jesus made both one.

How else did he do it? **15-16**. 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 end 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. Notice the purpose clause in there. He abolished the law of commandments *in order that* me might create one new humanity and to reconcile Jews and Gentiles in one body. No longer two but one. Gal 3:28: there is neither Jew nor Gentile. Col 3:11: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.”

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. **1:10**. In Christ, hostility is being removed and replaced with shalom. This unified new covenant community puts the wisdom of God on bright display – **3:9-10**.

2:17 – When did Jesus come and preach peace to the Ephesians? He didn’t. But Christians did. Jesus preaches as we preach. **18** – Notice the Trinity at work here. Through the Son, Jews and Gentiles have access to the Father in one Spirit. You see the Trinity in **v. 22** as well. We were far off but now have access to God! 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. / So, we have seen where we were before Christ (2:11-12), and where we are because of Christ, (2:13-18), now we take a look at:

III. What we are becoming in Christ (2:19-22) - 19 – So, then. Consequently. Because of Christ and the Spirit, you Gentiles were outsiders but have been made insiders. Notice how the gospel reverses what we read in **2:12**. 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.

¹³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 141.

¹⁴ O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 197.

¹⁵ Stott, *Ephesians*, 101.

20 – This household (family) is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone. The cornerstone was the most important stone. It was put down first, and every other stone lined up around this stone. All the other stones adjust to it. This lines right up with God’s eternal purpose to bring unity to all things under Christ (Eph 1:9-10). Friend, let me ask: is Christ your cornerstone? Do you seek to align everything you have going with him?

21-22 – This unified community of Christ is a holy temple. But this building grows. This is no static temple. The people of God are being built together into a house for God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God cannot be housed. His work knows no bounds. He doesn’t indwell a structure in Jerusalem but people spread across the globe.

Zooming out, what is the work of the Triune God in these verses? Unity in Christ. Oneness in Christ. Don’t miss the emphasis on oneness in these verses (**2:14, 15, 16, 18, 4:4-6**)? So, how should this affect us? **4:1-3**. I feel like we as a congregation are quite unified here at SSBC, but I also want us to seek for unity beyond these walls with other brothers and sisters, the capital C church, which is what Ephesians is about: the universal church, the lower-case “c” catholic church. Oneness. A temptation for churches like ours that takes theology so seriously is that we develop a divisive, disunified mindset. The Lord desires unity in Christ.

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.” This prayer is so significant. As Jesus is heading to the cross to create this unified community, he prays for our unity. The fractured nature of the capital C church must grieve the Spirit and damage our witness. Our unity with other believers is how the world will believe that the Father sent the Son.

As we talk about other believers and churches in different streams of the Christian faith, let’s be careful. The first response ought to be celebration and rejoicing of what God is doing, not criticism and fault-finding. We are all on the same team, even if we cross tees a bit differently. A temptation unique to a church like ours, with all of our careful and precise doctrinal distinctiveness, is to look down on churches that don’t do things like we do. Church, let’s fight that tendency. Let’s first look for evidences of grace. Let’s celebrate the work of the Spirit among churches we may not deem as healthy. Let’s not define ourselves by what divides us, but by what unites us. I am pumped that Cooper will be teaching the college kids the Apostle’s Creed in Sunday School – that which all Christians for all time have affirmed.

Unity does not mean sameness, it does not mean uniformity. Rather unity depends on differences coming together in light of a grander vision. God uses different types of churches to reach different types of people, and we ought to be thankful for that. So let’s be very slow criticize other churches. For every negative thing, find three positives. Major on majors. Focus on primary issues, not secondary and tertiary. King Jesus died to create one unified people. The King came to unite a fractured humanity, so let’s make every effort to keep ourselves united in the Spirit, binding ourselves together with peace. / Beautiful