



# Church Fusion • Ephesians 2:11-3:13

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September 11, 2022 • Tonganoxie Christian Church

## A Musical Intro...



*[Sit down and play at the piano...]*

- It is Well with my Soul
- Moonlight Sonata
- Hymns with a Classical Touch

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*Fusion.* It's when two distinct things merge to become something *else*. Something *different*. Something *new*.



Fusion happens around us all the time.

- **Baking.** When you make chocolate chip cookies, you fuse together different ingredients that taste much different than if you were to eat each ingredient separately. Eggs, flour, chocolate chips on their own? Ugh. Together? Yes!
- **Epoxy.** Construction folks and hobbyists know that certain chemicals can be mixed together to create a bonding material. Neither chemical will hold anything on its own, but when mixed together, the substance makes a super-strong bond.
- **The Sun.** When you glance at the big bright thing in the sky, it's bright because hydrogen atoms are being fused into helium atoms and releasing tremendous amounts of energy in the process.

And today, we're going to see fusion take place **in the church**. Before we begin, let's pray...

## Prayer

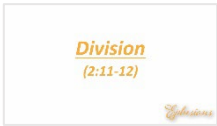
## Review



The book of Ephesians has been our focal point during the current sermon series. We've been walking through its content and learning more from the apostle Paul and his letter to the church in Ephesus.

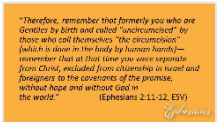
- We've covered his opening, including his **thanksgiving and prayers** (*densely packed with **doctrinal truths**, and full of reminders of the **spiritual blessings and connections we have***)...
- Last week, Mitch helped us explore **our own story** in the gospel message...

- This week – we have a long section (2:11-3:13) that comes as part of Paul’s **body** of the letter – filled with more theological truths. Still theologically dense, but focused on one subject: **fusion**.



## Division (2:11-12)

Of course, before we can have fusion, we must have two distinct things...separate things



*“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”* (Ephesians 2:11–12, NIV)

With these verses in chapter two, Paul jumps right in the middle of some big **divisions** that impacted the Ephesian church.



In our world, we are no strangers to division (more on that to come). We know that there are sizeable gaps between us, cultural chasms that cannot be bridged. There is a divide between people who love:

- Coke/Pepsi
- Chevy/Ford
- Apple/Android
- Chiefs/Broncos

But in the church at Ephesus, division was focused less on *product allegiance* and more on *spiritual heritage*. Their biggest division was between Jews and Gentiles.

## Jewish Believers



On the one hand, you had Jewish Christians in the church.

Now that raises the question, who is a Jew?  
(More specifically... *what does it mean to be a Jew?*)

The passage we just read in Ephesians 2:11-12 actually answers that question... just in the negative. Look back at verse 12...

- A Jew is part of the **“commonwealth of Israel”** – he is a citizen by birth and ancestry. He belongs to a special people. Paul once boasted of this himself – he shared his own credentials and position with the tribes of Israel in Philippians 3, making a comparison to other Jews who valued their national standing. In doing so, he tapped into the mindset of pride Jews held in their position.
- A Jew is part of the **“covenants of promise”** – he is a recipient of the promises of God made to his ancestors. God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob live

on. The covenant with Moses established the Jews as God's chosen people. They identify themselves in relation to the faithfulness of God.

- *Note:* Paul even points out the nickname “the circumcision” in v. 11 as a reference to the Jews and the physical symbol of their covenant standing. (*It's a weird “team name,” but those were different times, right?*)

- A Jew has **hope** and has **God!** Elsewhere, Paul, in his letter to the Romans, shares this synopsis of Jewish life:

*“They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”* (Romans 9:4–5, ESV)

So we have this description of Jewish Christians on the one hand.

## Gentile Believers

On the other hand, you had Gentile Christians in the church.

Who is a Gentile? Easy answer: not a Jew!

But what does it mean to be a Gentile?

Clearly it holds a lesser status, at least within this setting. Paul points out the slanderous nickname the Gentiles received – “the uncircumcision” (*literally, in the Greek, it's the anatomical name for what gets removed in circumcision...though \*shockingly\* none of the modern translations are bold enough to go with that rendition!*). However it is rendered in English, in the original wording it's presented as an insult. It's slanderous because it implies that the Gentiles were *lesser*...that they didn't belong.

At one time, Paul says, Gentiles were:

- Separated from Christ
- Alienated
- Strangers
- Having no hope, no God...they were “far off”

In other New Testament passages, we see the way non-Jews were excluded from the earliest church...and it took a miracle of God in Acts 10 to convince the Jews to allow them!

You don't have to know all the specifics to know the attitude. We all knew the mean girls in Jr High who wouldn't let people in their clique; we all knew the arrogant, popular guys who had the latest clothes and cars, who looked down on “losers.” (If you didn't know them, maybe you were them!)

“They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”  
(Romans 9:4–5, ESV)

*Lighthouse*

### Gentile Believers

- the “uncircumcised”
- Separated
- Alienated
- Strangers
- No hope
- No God!

*Lighthouse*

If you were on one side, you looked down on those who didn't measure up. If you were on the other, you looked down on those who acted like they were better.

Either way, this cultural divide of Jew/Gentile presented a major source of division in the early church.

## Division in the Church Today

So what about today?

The Ephesians' cultural clash highlights a mentality that still exists right now. In general, division in our world seems to be more intense than ever. We're conditioned to take sides and demonize the opposition. In fact, we're now getting to the point where if you are not 100% in agreement with me, you are the enemy! And *enemies* get insulted, get cancelled, get slandered, get excluded, or worse.

This happens in the world. But surely that can't happen here in the church...in Tonganoxie...can it? Well, *you tell me*. How well do we handle those who disagree with us a little or a lot? How much division is there on

- Big moral issues of the day (ex: abortion, LGBT issues)
- Big theological topics (ex: creation, end times)
- Big cultural debates (ex: gun control, immigration)
- Big personalities (ex: Rick Warren, Joel Osteen, Ross Frisbie)
- Big community issues (ex: new industries in town, property taxes)
- Big personal issues (ex: a family breaking apart, an unexpected scandal)

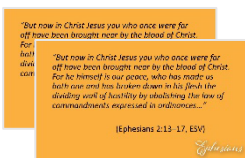
We started off talking about "fusion," but these items are "fission" – a division into two groups. In *nuclear* fission, when atoms split, there is a lot of explosive power! In *church* fission, there is explosive power as well. And even though there's no radiation, it's still poisonous and deadly.

Left to itself, division becomes more and more polarizing. Yet in our passage, Paul uses two words of hope: "But now..."

## Fusion (2:13-22)

*"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 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, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near."*  
(Ephesians 2:13–17, ESV)

Paul declares that this volatile division has been undone. Christ Jesus has begun a fusion instead!



## A Fusion of Tribes



The vague “tribe” of Gentiles is now being merged with the “tribes of Israel.”

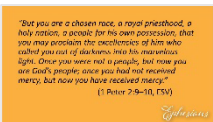
Don’t miss the significance here!

The people of the Ancient Middle East (and even the modern Middle East) viewed much of the world through the lens of their clans, and they were keenly aware of their relationship to one another.

*Optional note: This is why the book of Genesis shares other genealogies that listed the patriarchs of tribes and the peoples who came from them. We read about tribes descended from Noah and his sons (Genesis 10). Later, we read about the descendants of Lot who became the Moabites and Ammonites (Genesis 19). Esau fathered the Edomites (Genesis 36). Jacob, of course, was the head of the Israelites (Genesis 35ff).*

There was a strong awareness of who you were (tribal identity) and a big commitment to the success and reputation of your tribe. As such, your life was determined by ancestry – your relatives controlled a certain area, and that area was your nation. Tribal members shared language, religion, and beliefs. Their blood connections determined your allegiances and your privileges.

But here in Ephesians, Jesus is fusing the two into one! It’s a reality also described elsewhere in the New Testament:



*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9–10, ESV)*

Christians are described as a “tribe” of our own. When we are part of a tribe – part of God’s tribe – we are united by the same things that unite physical tribes:



- language (God’s Word)
- deity (Father/Son/Holy Spirit)
- blood (of Jesus)
- belief (Christian doctrine, such as the Apostle’s Creed).
- privileges that are reserved for the tribe that outsiders will never know (the gift of the Holy Spirit, eternity with God in heaven).

We are part of God’s tribe. We belong! Whatever separated us has been destroyed! The wall of hostility is gone.

How did this happen?

## The Source of Fusion

"For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So there are no longer

strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets..."

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Ephesians

The Source of Fusion



Ephesians

*"For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."*  
(Ephesians 2:18–22, ESV)

It's no surprise here...the blood of Christ is the powerful source of this fusion! He eliminates the old divisions. He does away with the law of commandments and replaces it with Himself – one body on the cross.

Instead of two, there is **one**. We are joined together. We are built together. Take a sneak peek ahead to Ephesians 4:4. We'll preach on this later, but check out what Paul says now:

*"There is **one** body and **one** Spirit—just as you were called to the **one** hope that belongs to your call— **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, **one** God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."* (Ephesians 4:4–6, ESV)

Whatever was different is now unimportant. Two distinct things have merged to become something *else*. Something *different*. Something *new*. Something *united*.

Can that still be the case today?

## Fusion in the Church Today

The explosive potential for division still exists today, but the overwhelming power of fusion and unity remains a reality.

Why? Because Jesus IS!

A few weeks ago, many of you know that I took a Sunday off work here to head across town to the United Methodist church.

*Optional:* That might have given you a bit of worry – Is Steve going Methodist? Of course not...

Seriously, though, why go over there? Two reasons...

Matthew Wilke, the minister at TUMC, and his wife were expecting a baby and he needed a little time away from the pulpit. Through the Ministerial Alliance, I've developed a friendship with Matthew. He's a good dude! So one reason was just to help out a friend.

But the second reason is that helping a friend also helped a congregation full of my brothers and sisters in Christ! They didn't have a lot of options for covering preaching at

Fusion in the Church TODAY



Ephesians

that time, but this CHURCH needed wisdom from Scripture. And with a green light from our own elders, I could provide that.

Are there some doctrinal landmines between us... sure. But Jesus gives us an option. We may have explosive potentials for division surrounding us but He has fused us – united us – into a *different level* of relationship. Rather than worrying about the landmines, its like we're plucked up above all that division and chaos and encouraged to live with our identity IN HIM as our guide.

The fused, united reality (accomplished by JESUS!) allows us to handle potentially explosive, divisive issues with grace and love.



- When faced with **disagreements**, we choose what will be most helpful for the other person. Why?

*“For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.” (Romans 14:7–8, ESV)*

- When faced with **rivalries**, we choose to avoid competition and shift the focus to the cross. See Paul’s example in 1 Corinthians

*“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:5–6, ESV)*

- When faced with **sin**, we choose to build up rather than tear down.

*“... keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” (Jude 20–23, ESV)*

Our church is built on Christ alone. That is our identity, that is what unites us. We are built together, and one of the slogans from our church’s heritage sums it up. “In essentials unity, in opinions liberty, in all things love.”

So, we know that there are plenty of forces that are prying us apart, yet in Jesus we are pulled together to be one people. Fusion/Unity is our reality...if we help each other figure it out.



## People Who Promote Fusion (3:1-13)

Fusion has existed for a while in the natural world...ever since God said ‘let there be stars’ (Gen1:14-19). But since then, there have been people in the scientific world who have contributed to its understanding and have been trying to harness its power... figures who didn’t *create it* but made a huge impact in *promoting it*.



Arthur Stanley Eddington and Hans Bethe were instrumental in understanding the process and trying to harness. Their work paved the way for others to learn and apply that knowledge in the realm of nuclear fusion.

But in Biblical fusion, Paul is one of the biggest figures. The next section of his letter covers this truth. Paul preached the gospel to the Jews *and* the Gentiles, making a formerly unknown part of God's plan known.

"When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." (Ephesians 3:4-6, ESV)

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Paul preaches this mystery everywhere he goes, for the benefit of the saints...making it known to everyone (even people in high places)...even to the point where he is imprisoned because of the message.

Paul's example is historically important...but it also serves as a challenge:

**How can we be a people who promote fusion?**

**How can you be a force for fusion in the church?**


## **How can YOU be a force for fusion/unity in the church?**

There will be more on this topic when we come to chapter 4 in a future sermon. But for now, I encourage you to focus on one of the key traits Paul mentions in today's passage: PEACE.

Jesus has "killed the hostility" (v. 16), and "broken down...the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14).

*"For he himself is our peace..." (Ephesians 2:14, ESV)*

**People who Promote Fusion**



Peace is listed as a fruit of the Spirit, and it MUST be something we pursue...because it is impossible to unite when you are fighting!

Of all of the potential sources of division we talked about earlier, every response we could have requires energy. What energy could you pour into the fight? You could...

- Gossip about someone
- Display outrage
- Act with malice
- Undermine their success

But peace isn't just the absence of war. Peace is an active process that requires different types of energy. The kind of peace Jesus desires (now that the wall of hostility has been torn down) creates unity when we pour energy into:

- Extending grace, allowing those with faults and flaws time to learn the truth and become proficient at living it out



- Forgiving others, not holding their sins against them
- Speaking with kindness, even when they are frazzled or frustrated
- Going the “extra mile,” knowing that your service is to God...not just them.

NONE OF THIS IS FUELED BY YOU. IT IS EMPOWERED SPIRITUALLY! IT IS A FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

NONE OF THIS IS BASED ON THEM. IT IS BECAUSE JESUS IS WHO HE IS. IT IS BECAUSE HE HAS CREATED A NEW REALITY FOR US THROUGH THE CROSS.

If we are going to have unity, we must actively choose to implement peace with the people sitting next to you (your family, your friends, your church leaders, your rivals, and even the handful of people you dislike). Not because they deserve it, but because this is what Jesus is accomplishing through us.

Making us ONE.

## Conclusion



As I said in my sermon two weeks ago, this truth should inspire a **relentless, doctrine-driven devotion** to one another. We should want our love for Jesus to be so captivating and consuming that it forms the most meaningful level of relationship with one another in the church.

We must live in light of what He has accomplished.

We can do it by:

Choosing to be a different and distinct people merged to become something *else*.

Choosing a church identity that is *different* than it was before. Choosing to act like a congregation that is *new*; a church that is *united*.

It will happen when YOU actively choose Spirit-driven peace. It will happen when YOU join together, connected to the cornerstone of Christ. It will happen when YOU decide to reconcile with one another.

**Let's choose to be a force for fusion in the church!**

## Prayer

## Invitation

As we come to our time of invitation, we invite you to be united with us – whether in prayer (coming forward to share a request that we can all pray for), or in a spiritual decision (coming forward to join with us in the church as a new member, or joining with Christ making a decision for baptism!) To share any of these, come forward and meet with me as we stand and as we sing.

# Sermon Notes

**Title:** *Church Fusion*

**Passage:** *Ephesians 2:11-3:13*

**Speaker:** *Steve Howell (Associate Minister)*

## 1. \_\_\_\_\_ (Ephesians 2:11-12)

\_\_\_\_\_ Believers

\_\_\_\_\_ Believers

Division in the Church \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ (Ephesians 2:13-22)

A Fusion of \_\_\_\_\_

The \_\_\_\_\_ of Fusion

Division in the Church \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. People Who \_\_\_\_\_ Fusion (Ephesians 3:1-13)

*How can you be a force for fusion in the church?*

# Sermon Discussion Questions

*Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.*

## ***Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose***

- Which friend of yours is the most different from you? In what ways (personality, interests, humor, heritage)?
- How do you overcome the differences to make your relationship thrive?

## ***Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters***

- Read Ephesians 2:11-12. Why was there such a division between the Jews and the Gentiles? Consider the religious and culture distinctions.
- In Acts 10:44-48, God demonstrates that Gentiles can receive the gifts of salvation and the Holy Spirit. Why, then, would some still find it difficult to associate and worship together?
- What divisions do we face within the church (moral, theological, cultural, community, etc)? How do these form a barrier to spiritual unity?
- How does Jesus help create unity amidst division? (see Ephesians 2:13 and following). What are the points on which we should find agreement?
- Who in your church experience has demonstrated this spirit of unity? How did they help create peace in the church?
- Are you a person who promotes peace and unity within the body? If not, what stands in your way? If so, how can you help others to share your approach?

## ***Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God***

- Pray for those who are different from you in the church. Ask God to bless them and reveal his riches in Christ. Pray for a spirit of unity with these brothers and sisters.
- Thank God for including you in His family!