

# EPHESIANS

Eph 2:11–18 || *But Now*

North Center || 3.10.2024

~ Pastor Jeremiah Knoop

**Context:** In our passage this morning, Paul is talking about the miracle of the gospel to bring people together **in Christ** who were at one time *rigidly opposed* to each other. It about how Jesus broke down the walls that once separated people, both from God and from one another.

It's a message that was extremely important for the Jews and the Gentiles at this moment in their history. Paul is dealing with a *specific* group of people (*Gentiles [Eph 2:11], non-Jews*)<sup>1</sup> about a *specific* situation at a *specific* time in church history, but his message is just as applicable for us today as it was the Ephesian church then – because we still struggle in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let's be honest: relationships are hard! They always have been, and (until Jesus returns) they always will be.<sup>2</sup> The human race has struggled with relationships since the beginning of our existence.

- Adam & Eve are made “one flesh” (Gen 2) and then (in Gen 3) they have serious relationship struggles
- Cain & Abel (Gen 4)
- Noah & one of his sons (Gen 9)
- Abram's family & Lot's family (13)
- Abram & Sarah (Gen 16)
- Esau & Jacob (Gen 25–27)
- Jacob & His Uncle Laban (Gen 29)
- Rachel & Leah (Gen 29–30)
- Joseph & His Brothers (37)
- Judah & His Daughter-in-law Tamar (38)

Right out of the gate, the Bible gives us a picture of strained relationships between (1) spouses, (2) brothers, (3) sisters, (4) parents & their children, (5) families, (6) extended relations, (7) in-laws... all part of God's chosen people...all in the first book of the Bible. And if we continue reading through the history of the church (Acts) and Paul's letters to the churches, we see that relationships are still just as hard today.

**Q.** And what causes these relationships struggles? you wonder...

**A.** Answer: everything under the sun: stress, greed, pride, lust, fear, personality differences, economic struggles, disappointment, shame, abuse, substance abuse, deceit, envy, moral failure, worship.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It's the same word that's translated as “nations” in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19): τὰ ἔθνη.

<sup>2</sup> This past week, I was meeting with a brother about joining our church as a covenant member, and one of the sentences in our member covenant is that we will protect the unity of our church by forgiving one another. I told him, “*The reason that sentence is so important is because the people in this church are going to let you down or hurt you or disappoint you or wrong you over and over and over again...and so will your pastor.*” Just because we are a family in Christ doesn't mean our relationship problems go away.

<sup>3</sup> If you're struggling in your relationship with somebody this morning, you are not alone. Every single one of us in this room knows what that feels like, and usually (in the moment) we feel like we have every right to hold onto this bitterness against that other person. “*Oh, pastor, if you only knew what they did to me. If you only knew what they said to me. If you only knew how they treated me. If you only knew how they made me feel...*”

I know you have your reasons. I also know that, as Jesus was nailed to a slab of wood and hung outside the city to die a criminal's death, He also had reasons to be bitter toward the people who treated Him that way. But that isn't the picture we get when we look at the cross. First, He says, “*Father, forgive them*” (**Luke 23:34**). The only bitterness that Jesus experienced that day was the bitterness that came from those around Him. In the final moments on the cross, the soldiers filled a sponge

What hope do we have for **peace** in our relationships? Paul addresses this question in our passage today.

As we look at the book of Ephesians, we are in the early years of Christianity (c. AD 60). Christianity is about 30 years old. At this point in church history, the biggest relationship struggle was between the Jews & Gentiles.

**Who were the Jews?** *Descendants of Abraham; children of Israel; God's chosen people in the OT.*

**Who were the Gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη)?** *The rest of the world. Those who were not the descendants of Abraham; not children of Israel; not part of God's chosen family.*

- Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians... *and every other non-Jewish people group.*

In **Amos 3:2**, we read that “*of all the families of the earth*”, God chose the Jews to be His tribe (φυλή; ἡβραῖα) in the OT, and **He set them apart** (*distinguished them*) from all the other nations of the world (**Exod 33:16**).

Why? Why would God take one family (who was “*least of all peoples*” [**Deut 7:7**]) and set them apart from all the other nations? Answer: *Because God is holy.*

One of the most important things we learn about God in the Bible is that **HE IS HOLY**. Set apart. No one like Him. He has no rivals. He has no equals. His ways are higher than all our ways. His thoughts are higher than all our thoughts. No beginning. No end. He knows all things. He sees all things. He controls all things. Every molecule in the universe exists by His Word. Every storm, every star, every season, every supernova obeys His voice. He tells rivers where to start. He tells oceans where to stop. He raises up kings, and He removes kings. He gives life, and He takes life. He is the source of love and is Himself Love. He is the source of all that is good and is Himself the only One who is good. He is our Light. He is our Life. He is our Hope. He is our Peace. There is no one like our God. **HE IS SET APART. HOLY.**

And because He is holy, He means for His people to be holy. He means for the world to see that (*of all the peoples of the earth*) there is none like His people, and thus, there is no god like their God.

For I am the LORD your God.

You shall **therefore** consecrate yourselves, and *you shall be holy; for I am holy.*

~ *Leviticus 11:44*

There are many professing Christians who think that, in order to reach the world, you must become just like the world, but God has always intended for His people to **be** different from the world around them.<sup>4</sup> To **live** different. To **think** different. To **act** different. To **love** different. To **be gloriously** different...so that all the nations might see just how different they are – and be drawn to their God as a result.

In the OT, God chose the Jews to be His set apart tribe, and then He gave them a number of things that clearly separated them from the rest of the world: the **Law** (*which was given to Moses*), the **Covenants** (*specifically the ones given to Abraham, Moses, and David*), the **sign** of the covenant (*circumcision, Gen 17:10*), and eventually the **Temple**. All of these things clearly communicated the holiness of God and the holiness of His people, and this display of holiness was intended to be **so glorious** that all the nations of the world would be drawn into it.

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with the bitter wine and put it to His mouth (**John 19:29**). What happened next? Jesus received the bitter drink, and then He said, “*It is finished!*” and He gave up His life (**John 19:30**).

Whatever reasons you have to be bitter toward a brother or sister in Christ, Jesus died for that reason. Jesus drank the bitter cup of God's wrath for our sin, and He drank the bitterness that came those who were abusing Him. There was a bitterness that came from God the Father (*the cup of wrath*), and there was a bitterness that came from sinful people (*the sponge full of sour wine*). On the cross, Jesus drank all of it (*until it was all finished*), and then He died, taking all the bitterness of sin with Him. Jesus died so that there would be no bitterness between you and God, and He died so that there would be no bitterness between you and the people of God.

<sup>4</sup> **John 17:14-17** (*not of this world*); **Romans 12:2** (*do not be conformed*); **1 Peter 2:9** (*you are a holy nation*).

- God’s  **blessing**  to Abraham was that he would be the father (not of many children) but of *many nations*.
  - **Genesis 17:5** (Gr. πολλῶν ἐθνῶν; Heb. אֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ).
- God’s  **promise**  to Isaac was that He would use him to bless *all the nations of the earth*.
  - **Genesis 26:4** (Gr. πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς; Heb. כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ).
- The  **temple**  was to be called a house of prayer “*for all nations*”.
  - **Isaiah 56:7** (Gr. πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν; Heb. כָּל־הָעַמִּים).
- The  **prophets**  spoke of *all the nations* being drawn to come to this beautiful God.
  - **Haggai 2:7** (Gr. πάντα τὰ ἔθνη; Heb. כָּל־הָעַמִּים).
- The  **psalmists**  wrote about *all the nations* being compelled to join *this* people in worshipping *this* God.
  - **Psalms 22:27–28** (Gr. πᾶσαι αἱ πατριαὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν; Heb. כָּל־מִשְׁפָּחֹת גּוֹיִם).

Anybody could be brought into the Jewish family by becoming a proselyte (e.g., Rahab the Canaanite;<sup>5</sup> Ruth the Moabite<sup>6</sup>), but to be outside of God’s Jewish family was to be outside of God. This what Paul is talking about in **Ephesians 2:11–12**. ...**READ**... In the OT, to be a Gentile was to be a **foreigner** of God’s special & particular blessings, a **stranger** to all of God’s good promises, to have no knowledge of the true and living God and therefore to have **no hope** in the world. Therefore, the point of all these OT things was to show you that you are **outside** of God and that, in order to experience any of these things, you need to be on the **inside**.

In other words, the Law was good.<sup>7</sup> The covenants were good. The sign of the covenant was good. The temple was good. *All that God does is good, and all that God gives is good* (Psalm 145:17; Mark 10:18; James 1:17). But (as people so often do) they twisted what was intended to **win** the world **to** God and used them as a **weapon against** the world. Instead of seeing how God had exalted them as a means of  **blessing**  the world, they looked at their exaltation and saw themselves as  **better**  than the world.

What was meant to  **distinguish**  God’s people from the rest of the world became a means of  **dividing**  them against the world. By the time Jesus came, the Jewish religion was so broken that it was no longer seen as a symbol of  **blessing**  to the nations; rather, it served as a giant symbol of  **division**.<sup>8</sup> “*We’re in; you’re out; nana-nana-boo-boo!*” The nations were scum to be avoided, not lost people to be rescued.<sup>9</sup> And, on the whole, the world despised the Jews, and the Jews despised the world.

This is one of the many reasons why the Jews had such a hard time with Jesus: He didn’t despise the people that they thought He should have despised – including the Gentiles.<sup>10</sup> Even His disciples had a hard time with the way Jesus included Gentiles in His ministry, and  **this hardship didn’t just disappear**  even after Jesus conquered the grave, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and filled them with His Holy Spirit.

When Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission, He said, “**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations** (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) ...” (Matt 28:18). This was always the trajectory of God’s plan of redemption (*the nations*), and this was their specific calling.

And to give them a jumpstart, God waited to send His Spirit until “**Jews...from every nation under heaven**” (παντὸς ἔθνους) were gathered together in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5). Over 3,000 Jews put their faith in Jesus that day, and as they returned to their homes throughout all the nations, they were taking the gospel of Jesus with them! So (1) God commanded them to go to the nations, (2) He gave them a huge jumpstart by surrounding them with Jews from every nation on their very first day of ministry; and then what happens...?

<sup>5</sup> Josh 2, 6; Matt 1:5.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth 1–4; Matt 1:5.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Rom 3:2; 7:7; 1 Tim 1:8.

<sup>8</sup> **Greek inscription over one of the doors of the temple:** (discovered in 1871) “*No foreigner is to enter within the forecourt and the balustrade around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his subsequent death.*”

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Mark 2:17; Luke 10:25–37; 19:10; John 3:16.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Matt 2:1–12 (Gentile wisemen); 8:8–10 (Roman centurion as an example of faith); 9:10–17 (eating with sinners)...

Approximately a decade later, the apostles were still only sharing the gospel with other Jews. It wasn't until the Spirit of God led Peter to preach the gospel to a Gentile named Cornelius (**Acts 10**) that they finally realized that the gospel was for all people – not just the Jews. In fact, after Peter shared the gospel with Cornelius and then baptized him (**Acts 10:48**), the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem brought Peter in for an interrogation: “*You ate with people who are uncircumcised!*” (**Acts 11:3**). So, Peter explained what God had done in Cornelius's life, and then it says that “*When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’*” (**Acts 11:18**). It took them 10 years to see this!

It took them 10 years to see that the way things used to be is not the way things are NOW in Christ. And so **Ephesians 2:13** would become one of the most radical sentences that a Jew like Paul would ever write:

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

- You were once a foreigner... **but now**
- You were once a stranger... **but now**
- You were once without hope... **but now**
- You were once far off... **but now** you have been brought near.

Why? Because Jesus broke down the wall of separation.

**READ EPHESIANS 2:14–18**

The only thing that matters now is whether or not you know Jesus.<sup>12</sup> **Nothing else matters.** Daily sacrifices, *gone*. The dividing wall inside the temple, *broken down*. The law full of commandments, *abolished*. Old covenants, *fulfilled*. What's left? **Jesus.**<sup>13</sup>

And this means that everyone who is in Christ has equal access to the Father. This is the stunning point of **Eph 2:11–18**. It doesn't matter who you are; *the gospel is for you*. If you don't know Jesus this morning, Paul's message to you is that the only thing separating you from being part of the family of God is your own unbelieving heart. Every dividing wall is gone. The only thing that remains is Christ, and so the only question is “*Will you trust Him with your life?*”

If you believe in Jesus (*not just intellectually* [**James 2:19**], *but wholeheartedly* [**Matt 22:37**]; *if you confess Him as the King of your heart*), then you are part of His family (**Rom 10:9–10**). We are one in Christ with our brothers and sisters from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue under the Son (**Rev 7:9**). Your skin color, not a barrier. Race, not a barrier. Sinful past, not a barrier. Why? Because Jesus took care of all of that on cross.

## Applications

1. Do you desire to be saved? Trust in Jesus. He made the way.
2. Do you desire peace in your relationships? Turn your eyes on Jesus. He is our peace; He makes peace; and He came to preach peace – a kind of peace that this world cannot understand.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Everything good about the OT (the old way) was fulfilled in Jesus (**Matt 5:17–18**). He fulfilled the Law and the Covenants, and so they were no longer valid in determining who was part of God's family and who was not (**Rom 7:4**). He ripped the dividing curtain in the Temple because the Spirit of God was now going to dwell in the hearts of His people. The sign of the Old Covenant (Circumcision) no longer mattered because Jesus had made a new covenant with His blood. The story of the OC was all fulfilled in the Christ. He accomplished everything the OT was pointing forward to. The OT was the portrait; Jesus was the Person.

<sup>12</sup> Matt 7:21–23; Phil 3:7–11.

<sup>13</sup> Matt 17:8; John 12:21.

<sup>14</sup> John 14:27 (not as the world gives); Phil 4:6–7 (passes understanding). **Peace** like the kind **Corrie Ten Boom** experienced.