

# A New Humanity

Eph. 2:11-22

Separated from my friends at the Wald Park Pool. There was me and there was them. I was on the outside, they were on the inside. And Paul starts out this passage by making a very explicit distinction between people who were on the inside and people who were on the outside. And of course, I'm not speaking in reference to Wald Park Pool. I'm speaking in reference to the blessings and privileges of being God's people. We quick to think of ourselves as God's people, and through faith we are. But it didn't start that way. In fact God's people didn't start with *people* at all it started with one person and guy named Abram. And God made a covenant with Abraham and promised him that he would make his offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and give them land and bless them. And that's exactly what happened. And it was this group of people—Abraham and his descendants—that God chose to be his special people—we know them as the nation of Israel—ethnic Jews. These were God's covenant people and everyone else—every other ethnicity were called Gentiles. And so these are the two groups that Paul has in mind here in this passage.

And it's important to realize that God had set up Israel in a way that would make them distinct from all the other nations. They were set apart in a spiritual sense because they were God's unique people, but that also set them apart in their behavior. He gave them a law with very and unique and specific commands designed to symbolically communicate that they weren't like everyone else. Kind of like a police officer who has a uniform, badge, and gun that clearly distinguishes him or her from everyone else. In fact, Israel was even set apart physically—God commanded Israelites males to be circumcised on the eighth day as a physical symbol that their entire lives down to the most secret intimate parts were set apart to God. And God did this not because Israel was better than anyone else, but simply because he loved them wanted to keep them from becoming like the rest of the world. He didn't want them following after their Gods.

But rather than see the law as a means to holiness, it became a means to pride. Paul tells the Jews in Romans 2:23 that they boast in the law but they don't even keep it. They didn't care holiness—they were just proud that they weren't like “those” people who weren't circumcised and didn't have God's special rules. And as you can imagine this arrogance and hypocrisy about these laws and regulations led to hard feelings between Israel and...everyone else. Paul even calls it hostility in vs 14-15, “the dividing wall of hostility, the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.”

Bottom Line: Jews didn't play nice with all the other boys and girls. They didn't associate with others. Being around a Gentile could make a Jew ceremonially unclean. Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs. In fact, in vs. 11 Paul says that the Jews—those people who were circumcised—referred to the Gentiles as, “the uncircumcision”. Literally translated means, “the foreskins” That's a heck of a nickname. We called each other names at school back in the day, but I don't think anyone used that one. So we have Jews—God's special chosen ethnic people and Gentiles—the unclean, the dogs, the foreskins and if haven't put it together yet—you and I are the Gentiles. And the first verb in this passage is “remember” for a reason—Paul doesn't want you to forget this morning that redemption and God's covenant love hasn't always been on the table for you and me. Like my experience at the pool so many years ago, you and I stood on the outside and at very best could look into the love that someone else enjoyed. The commitment that someone else was promised.

That's why he says in vs. 13, "remember that you were at that time, separated from Christ" "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

We had no hope. We weren't promised Messiah, Israel was—this is hard for us to remember because we know the end of the story but that's why Paul is specifically asking us to remember. We didn't have the "covenants of the promise"...scholars debate which covenants Paul is referencing here, but just about everyone agrees at the very least New Covenant is in view here, and here's the rub, it wasn't made to Gentiles. Jer. 31:31, 33b. If you're a Gentile reading this, it doesn't give you hope because it's not for you. No Messiah, no New Covenant, no hope, that phrase "without God" is where we get our word "atheist" from...and this is where it gets good.

Vs. 13 says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Look at 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." And just to make sure no one is confused he says in Eph. 3:6 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. This is the astonishing plot-twist of the Gospel. This is the mystery that Paul is unpacking in Ephesians: The Gentiles get to participate in the benefits of Israel's messiah! You get to participate in New Covenant! Why—Because Christ has brought you near by his blood.

And our first reaction should be "YES!" and then we've got to ask the question... "How?" And that's the question that Paul answers next. And it's a two part answer, he says in vs. 14, "For he himself is our peace who has made both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances. Watch what Jesus is doing...We said that it was the law its regulations that visibly set the Jews apart put a wall between them and everyone else, it was the law that the Jews boasted in—not obeyed—bragged about as a kind of VIP badge to set themselves apart from "those other people." And Jesus comes and knocks that wall down. The very thing that that served as the boundary between Jews and Gentiles is now dissolved. Why did Christ do this?

Vs. 15, "that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace and might reconcile us both to God through the cross thereby killing the hostility." Jesus has come, not to make new rules, but to make a new humanity. A new man in place of the two. He has come to make a new people. There use to be team Jew and team Gentile. And Jesus came not so that Gentiles could team Jew or that team Jew could join team Gentile...He's come to create a completely new team—team Jesus—And the criteria for entry into this team isn't ethnicity it's faith! Christ's new people are nothing less than new creations. Believers. Worshipers. What the Israelite community was supposed to be, but wasn't.

Paul uses different terms in the NT to refer to this born-again community. Let me show you three of them. One name is "Inward Jews". In Rom. 2:28-29 Paul redefines what it means to be a Jew. "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God." One more label for this new people, "Israel of God" Gal. 6:15-16: "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."

If God makes a new person out of two people, then there must be three kinds of people, look at Paul in 1 Cor 10 “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.” (1 Cor. 10:32) Here is the one man in place of the two. No longer are you born into the people of God to blessings you enjoy because of your ethnicity. Now, you are born again into the people of God to blessings you enjoy through union with Christ! God no longer makes a distinction between Jews and Gentiles, which if you’re a Jew is almost unbearable to hear but it’s exactly what Peter says in Acts 15 when he’s talking about his ministry to the Gentiles, “And God who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.”

Don’t miss Jesus’ purpose in all of this. He desire is not just to unite people to him. It’s to unite Jews and Gentiles to one another. It’s racial reconciliation, in Christ. And it brings peace...peace that would never come if there was always this racial distinction. The word peace is mentioned four times in the span of four verses here, vs. 14 “For he himself is our peace...vs. 15 that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.” He continues in 16 “He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who are near. For through him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

Now we can be at peace with one another because there’s no longer a distinction. Jews and Gentiles—everyone in the world—is now offered what only Israel used to have—access to God. This kills the hostility of racial tension, and brings peace! And because of this peace—this reconciling of Jews and Gentiles—means 4 things for God’s new community of faith.

### **A United Community**

And by that, I mean Christ has united believers—be they Jewish believers or Gentile believers—Christ has united us to one another through the Spirit. It’s a fact. Sometimes in ministry circles I’ll hear, “We need to create unity in our church” But this where we need to be clear we don’t come together to create unity. We come to express the unity that Christ died to bring us. And that’s what makes the church different from any other community in the world. Think about it, some communities unite around common interests (fitness, sports, music) common life stages (young professionals or older folks—even in the church) even common causes (poverty relief, earth care, or even our country). These are “Gospel Plus” churches. Mark Dever said, if a church is united by something other than the Gospel they create a community that would likely exist even if God didn’t. The uniting power of the Gospel is most clearly seen when a diversity of people come together for reasons that are totally inexplicable from a worldly perspective.

We do not come here united in the name of our common interests or our race we don’t come here in the name of morality or mutual respect...we don’t come here in the name of a political party or our country...we come here in the name of a king. That’s what unites us. Recognizing that while we have different stories there’s a sense in which we all have the same story...all struggling with one problem sin. All needing one thing redemption. All looking to one Savior—Jesus. All seeking to advance one kingdom. All of us looking toward one ultimate hope—eternal life with Jesus. This is what unites us, and if we try to artificially create community around anything else, then we the world that the Gospel isn’t enough to bring us together. A united community and second...

### **A Multi-Ethnic Community**

Look at 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.” We have been born again into a multi-ethnic family—Jews and Gentiles. Black and white. Hispanic and Asian. African European. And if you go back to God’s promises to Abraham, you’ll see that that’s exactly how God planned it from the beginning. In his masterplan, covenant relationship with God was never meant to be the exclusive privilege of one race. That’s why God tells Abraham in Gen. 22:18 that, “In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”

Jesus commission his disciples in Acts chapter 1 by saying, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” God has designed the church to be multi-ethnic community.

And that’s why there is absolutely no room for racism in the church. Racism is not just a political issue. It is a gospel issue. Jesus died to unite races and we are out of step with the Gospel of truth if we’re erecting barriers and trying to separate ourselves from people who don’t look like us and may have a different culture. I’m not racist, I just don’t want to live by them, my children to god to school with them, or my daughter to marry one, just want to be separate—that’s what he KKK says.

KKK used to have a statement about a rainbow. And if God decided to show the beauty of his church through separation, that would be a fair illustration. But he hasn’t It’s the exact opposite, God has chosen to display his glorious reconciling uniting power through racial cultural colorful interrogation. And the church is like an orchestra innumerable instruments and pitches and voices and harmonies and rhythms all of it coming together to form the unified beautiful song of the redeemed.

This is what heaven is going to be like! “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,” (Rev. 7:9) Which means that we need to stop saying things like God is color-blind. I mostly hear white people this is and they don’t say it explicitly but what they often mean is, “God is colorblind, he sees everyone as white!” But he doesn’t. He’s not colorblind. He sees every color and celebrates it as a testimony to his creative brilliance and it is that multi-colored family multi-cultural household that you and I have been saved into through the racial reconciliation that Christ has bought in his cross. So the peace Christ brings us leads to a united community a multi-ethnic community and

**A Word-Centered Community** vs. 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” The cornerstone was the principal stone around which construction was achieved in the ancient world...it was the thing that the building depended on for it’s structural integrity. Again, notice our united multi-ethnic community isn’t built on the foundation of common interest or race, but on Christ and the revelation he brought through the apostle and prophets. Scholars go back and forth on what exactly Paul is referencing here by prophets...Peter Obrien said, “The apostles and Christian prophets are both seen as those to whom God made known the revelation of the Gospel, and who were the first proclaimers of it. To assert, the, that the Gentile believers are built upon the apostles and prophets is to state that their membership in God’s people rests of the normative teaching that arises from divine revelation.” So Gentiles are included in God’s covenant community based on divine revelation—the work and words of God—and this is preserved for us in the Scriptures! And the God it reveals and the truth it proclaims serve as the foundation of our faith.

We recently had to make some changes in the foundation of our house some pipes were broken under it, so we had to jackhammer the foundation. We had to make some changes! But the foundation on which we stand as a church never changes. God’s Word is the life-giving divinely inspired, authoritative Word for us today! And we don’t modify it simply because some of what it says may be sound strange to our culture or politically incorrect. The truth is that Jesus did say things and his word says things that seem foreign to our culture and certainly politically incorrect. But we can’t temper it just because it makes us uncomfortable. The Words teaching on marriage and gender, God’s definition of love, God’s exhortation that we are sinful and wrath deserving and that only those who trust in Christ can be saved.” Those are offensive to our culture but if we try to get rid of the parts of the Word that don’t sit well with us, we’re rejecting the very

foundation that we're built upon as God's people. And he is building us! No one lays a foundation and just looks at it.

Now a foundation serves a purpose...the foundation supports what's being built on top of it. And in the same way, with the Word as our foundation, God is building us into something amazing. Look here.

Vs. 21 "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."

The peace Christ's brings through the cross produces a United Community, a Multi-Ethnic Community, a Word Centered-Community and A Spirit-Filled community.

### **A Spirit-Filled Community**

God has always wanted to be with his people but this was a problem because he was holy. Tabernacle—temple—holy of holies God's immediate presence, gold high priest once a year....but the blood of goats and bulls couldn't take away sin...Jesus comes and tabernacles among us... and the Spirit descends on him and becomes the true temple, the dwelling place of God, where people can come to receive forgiveness for their sins...and what's incredible is that when Jesus ascended He sent the Spirit...Why?

Because he's building a temple! With bricks and mortar? No, with people!—we are dwelling place for God, by his Spirit—the church is the people in which God has placed his Spirit...

Which means we play a part in building the temple! Mission is Temple building. Build the temple until the day where God's Spirit and his immediate presence covers the whole earth!

Slides.