

# **EPHESIANS**

Part 4: “One Body through the Cross”

*Ephesians 2:11-22*

Sunday, September 9, 2018

By David A. Ritchie

## **Scripture**

<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> 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, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. <sup>1</sup>

*Almighty and Everlasting God, we thank you for your gospel of peace. Through the work of Jesus Christ, your son, you have made a way to reconcile us to you and to one another. May your Spirit illuminate our heart and empower our lives so that we both know and walk in your truth. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus, AMEN.*

## **Introduction**

There is a very real distinction with believing a truth with your mind and embodying that same truth with your life. Life and human history is replete with people who sincerely and passionately believe certain ideals, but then fail to embody those same ideals with their lives in ways that are obvious to everyone else.

Samuel isn't our biggest kid or our strongest kid, but he is certainly our loudest. He is our middle child, and because of that, you could say that he cares a great deal about the virtue of fairness. If Samuel feels like he has not been treated fairly by one of his brothers, he will let us know, and he will let us know with ample amounts of volume.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Eph 2:11–22.

However, we have learned, Samuel isn't entirely consistent in the way he applies the principle of fairness.

Since our house has three boys, we have lots of superhero costumes and lots of toy swords. A few days ago, my wife heard Samuel screaming as the boys were playing. She came to see what the matter was only to find, Simon Peter (our youngest) ripping a toy sword out of Samuel's hand. Now it was obvious to Kate that Samuel had the toy first and that Simon Peter had taken it away from Samuel against his will.

But with Samuel, we have learned not to trust first impressions. He is like a professional soccer player when it comes to his acting ability. So even though Samuel was protesting his unfair treatment from his brother, my wife began to investigate further. She asked Simon Peter why he wanted this sword, and Simon Peter said it was because Samuel had stolen all the swords. So my wife launched an investigation, all the swords in the house were under the bed sheets of none other than Samuel Ritchie.

Samuel cared very much about the idea of fairness, but there was this disconnect between the idea of fairness in his mind and how this idea played out in relationship with his brothers. This is something we are all tempted to do.

How is it possible that Thomas Jefferson, one of our founding fathers, and the man who wrote, *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"*; how is it possible that this man, at the time of writing those words, is one of the largest slave-owners in the state of Virginia?

We can believe great and glorious truths with our minds, but fail to embody those truths with our lives.

As Paul is writing this letter to the Ephesian church, I believe he is very aware of this tendency in the human heart. He has just finished explain the glory of the grace of God in salvation in the previous ten verses (Eph. 2:1-10). He has just proclaimed that we were all once dead in our trespasses and sins, but that God being rich in mercy has made us alive together in Christ Jesus, and that by grace we have been saved through faith. This is not our doing we can't take credit for it, it is the gift of God so that we can walk in good works.

But Paul knows all too well that it is possible to say you believe in this beautiful truth of God's grace, but fail to embody that truth in our lives. That is the reason for the passage that is before us today.

It is a beautiful passage, but it is a richly complex passage, so what I want to do is begin with a summary of the big idea. Here it is: ***Those who were once alienated have now been reconciled to God and one another by the blood of Jesus Christ, and the church -- that is God's people -- are called to embody this radical truth.***

Let's spend some time unpacking each facet of this summary.

## **Exposition**

### **1. Our former alienation**

Anyone who has gone to high school or junior high knows there is a very real difference when you are in the “in-crowd” and when you are not a part of the “in-crowd.”

In ancient times, Jews were the “in-crowd” when it came to having a relationship with God. Gentiles (ἄθροος), who were everyone else, was very much not in the “in-crowd.”

As our text says, Jews were called the circumcision, and Gentiles were the uncircumcision (2:11). Now, if you don’t know what circumcision is, I would refer you to Wikipedia or a urologist. But for our purposes, what you need to know is that circumcision (if you were a man) used to be the tell-tale sign that you were part of God’s people. It was essentially an Old Testament sacrament that meant you had a relationship with God.<sup>2</sup> So if you were not circumcised, it was not possible for you to really be a part of God’s people.

This posed a real problem for the majority of Christians who were in the Ephesian church. And it created a source of potential division between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians who were a part of this church.

Typically Jews and Gentiles hated one another. William Barclay explains this deep, historical hatred in further detail:

*“The Jews had an immense contempt for the Gentiles. They said that the Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell and that God loved only Israel of all the nations that he had made. ‘The best of the serpents crush,’ they said, ‘the best of the Gentiles kill.’ It was not even lawful to give help to a Gentile woman in childbirth, for that would be to bring another Gentile into the world. The barrier between Jews and Gentiles was absolute. If a Jew married a Gentile, the funeral of that Jew was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death; even going into the house of a Gentile made a Jew unclean.”<sup>3</sup>*

In our day and age, the Jew/Gentile divide might not be the primary pressure point in the contemporary church, although in some places it is. What this shows us is that we are gravitationally pulled toward division and hostility based on our shared group identity.

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<sup>2</sup> “God usually connects his grace with the sacraments, their want of the sacraments is taken as an evidence that neither were they partakers of his grace.” John Calvin and William Pringle, [\*Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians\*](#) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 232.

<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, [\*The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians\*](#), The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 123.

We easily divide ourselves on things like race, gender, age, or political affiliation. Instead of Jew versus Gentile, we have black versus white, men versus women, millennials versus boomers, conservatives versus liberals.

In the ancient world, people groups often competed with one another for to see who could have greater power. In America, people groups seem to compete with one another to see who could be the greater victim. And truly, some of these divisions have deep histories and deep wounds

But whether you lived in the ancient Roman Empire or in modern day America, Paul is trying to teach us how we are so often tempted to look to our group identity as a way to achieve a false sense of validation and justification. In other words, we pit our group against other groups as a way to feel better about ourselves.

And one of the big ideas that this text is saying to us is that our alienation and estrangement from one another flows from our alienation and estrangement from God. In other words, we have no hope to have true reconciliation with one another, until we have reconciliation with God.

## **2. Our present reconciliation**

The temple  
The divisions of the temple  
Sin is a problem, but God has made a way to dwell with his people  
Through the blood of sacrifice

In this text, Paul is saying  
The cross of Christ is the true and better sacrifice that ends all other sacrifices  
At the cross, Jesus absorbed the penalty of our sin  
His blood forgives and cleanses us  
The walls are broken down  
The veil is torn

Our reconciliation with God can lead to reconciliation with one another  
Our reconciliation with God *must* lead to reconciliation with one another  
Two groups of people who were once divided by hostility have become one body  
Race still exists, but it is no longer our primary identity or allegiance  
*“as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10)*

The social problem is rooted in sin problem  
Politics will not answer this problem, because politics cannot transform the root motivations of the human heart

## **3. Our call to embody the peace of God**

Those who were once aliens are now more than residents; they are citizens.

Those who were far off have more than just a seat at the table; they are family. Those who were once without God (□θεοι) have more than just access to God's presence; they are being built up into the temple of God and a dwelling place for God's Spirit.

This is a truth that is meant to be tangibly played out in real ways

First example

Paul's confrontation of Peter at Galatia

Second example

Paul and Trophimus at the temple in Jerusalem

The cause of concern and the cause of offense and outrage in Jerusalem was not the gospel itself, but an application of the gospel

To seek racial harmony is not the gospel, it is an application of the gospel

You cannot say you believe Eph. 2:1-10 and purposely avoid living out Eph. 2:11-22

Just stick to the gospel

Christianity and Marxism

Marxists care about alienation

They do not care about reconciliation

Meaning: just stick to the parts of the gospel that don't challenge me, parts of the gospel that don't confront my personal comfort level, cultural norms, or political ideology, parts of the gospel that don't require anything of me

Redeemer is a courageous church on this matter

We will seek the alienated

Refugees

Families with autistic children

We will seek peace where there is division

Conference

Worship services

Why? Because we are progressive? No, because we are obedient.

Because our world is asking a question, and we have the answer

Where might God be calling to be an agent of reconciliation

A person?

The media you consume? The media you put out?

Involvement in your community?

OT: The nations come to Jerusalem

NT: Jerusalem is sent to the nations

We put flesh on the idea of reconciliation

In the name of the word who became flesh and dwelt among us

We are to embody a future that is to come

*"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, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10, ESV).*

We were once alienated. Now we are reconciled. We are one body through the cross. May we embody this gospel of peace.

### **Questions for Community Group Discussion**

*1.) Summarize the big idea(s) of Ephesians 2:11-22 in your own words.*

*2.) What are some modern examples of division and alienation in our world today?*

*3.) According to this text, how does the work of Christ reconcile us both to God and to one another?*

*4.) How might the church, as the people of God, embody the truth of reconciliation to the world around us?*

## Bibliography

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