

# Life in God's new Family

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Ephesians 2:11-22

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Good evening, everyone.

It is a blessing to be back.

Thank you, One Voice family, for praying with and for me as I have been in seminary.

I just graduated a few days ago and I'm excited about what the Lord will continue to do in our lives here at One Voice.

Being together as redeemed people from different tribes, tongues, and nations shows that indeed God has reconciled us to Himself and to one another in Christ.

As we experience the pain of conflict among ourselves, we learn to reconcile and make peace with one another.

Today's passage shows that as children of God, we have all that is necessary to be peacemakers.

Hear now the Word of the Lord from Ephesians 2:11-22.

11 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—

12 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.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

15 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,

16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

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,

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.

22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

About this passage, the English Pastor John Stott wrote:

"Paul traces his Gentile readers' spiritual biography in three stages...

The three stages are marked by the expressions 'at one time' (verse 11), 'but now' (verse 13) and 'so then' (verse 19).

I have organized this message using those same points:

- (1) What we once were (verses 11-12);
- (2) What Christ has done (verses 13-18);
- and (3) what we have become (verses 19-22).

Before we begin with our first point, let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word and its power to change lives.

We pray that you would enlighten our hearts and minds.

We pray that your word will shape, mold, and conform us to the image of your Son.

May your Spirit fill us even now.

Help me as I speak your word to your people.

And help your people as they listen.

I pray that together we will be edified and motivated to glorify you in all we do.

We pray this trusting in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen!

## **Point 1: What we once were (verses 11-12).**

The phrase "at one time" points us to the past.

We can forget how privileged we are today, unless we remember what it meant to be unprivileged.

Paul wants the Ephesians "to keep in mind" what their condition was before they met Christ.

As Gentiles, the believers in Ephesus were called "the uncircumcision" by Jews.

All Israelite boys were circumcised when they were 8 days old.

This circumcision was "made in the flesh by hands." Any non-Jews who desired to be part of God's covenant community had to be circumcised, because they were considered unclean.

This explains what verse 12 is referring to.

The Ephesian Gentiles were "Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless."

This description reminds me of what Isaiah said about people who are outside of God's covenant community.

Isaiah 8:22 says:

22 "And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish.

And they will be thrust into thick darkness."

However, God does not want us to remain in thick darkness.

The Prince of Peace brought light where there was gloom and anguish.

Listen to what Isaiah wrote next in Isaiah 9:1a,2:

1a "But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish...

2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;

those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."

This darkness is not a result of dead light bulbs.

Isaiah is speaking about the relational darkness of being separated from God.

Jesus Christ faced and defeated that darkness on the cross.

Matthew 27:45-46 says:

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying:

"Eli, Eli, lema sabachtani?"

That is, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

On the cross, God the Son was plunged into darkness.

He was alienated from God the Father, for the sake of alienated humanity.

He suffered this because of your sin and my sin.

But, because Christ was forsaken, now we are accepted.

This brings us to our second point.

## **Point 2: What Jesus Christ has done (verses 13-18).**

In verses 13 through 18, the phrase "but now" points us to a shift of subject, from what we once were to what Christ has done.

Verse 13 says:

13 "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

You might wonder why blood was required.

Hebrews 9:22b tells us that:

"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

Death is the penalty for sinning against the holy God.

Only the blood of someone perfect in holiness and purity could be accepted before God the Father.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says:

"For our sake God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Through the shedding of Christ's blood we can receive forgiveness of sin and be brought near to God.

This is the reason verse 14 says:

14 "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility."

Jesus did what no other man could do; He put His life on the line.

He died so that you and I can be at peace with God.

Biblical peace is "total well-being, prosperity, and security associated with God's presence among His people."

The death and resurrection of Jesus made it possible for Jews and Gentiles to experience peace.

"The wall of hostility" in verse 14 refers to a spiritual separation, and to a physical wall at the temple.

Listen to one historian's description of that wall:

"[The wall of hostility] was a notable feature of the magnificent temple built in Jerusalem by Herod the Great.

The temple building itself was constructed on an elevated platform.

Around it was the Court of the Priests.

East of this was the Court of Israel, and further east the Court of the Women.

These three courts--for the priests, the men, and the women of Israel--were on the same elevation as the temple.

From this level one descended five steps to a walled platform.

Then on the other side of the wall fourteen more steps to another wall, beyond which was the outer Court of the Gentiles...

The Gentiles could look up and view the temple, but were not allowed to approach it.

They were cut off from it by the surrounding stone barricade with warning notices in Greek and Latin.

They read, in effect: 'Trespassers will be executed.'

When Christ was executed for our sin, He killed this wall of hostility that separated the Jews and the Gentiles from God and one another.

When Paul wrote this letter to Ephesus, that stone wall at the temple was still standing.

But the spiritual wall had been already removed through the death of Christ on the cross.

Paul also shows us how Christ removed the wall of hostility, in verse 15:

15 "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."

Does this mean that Jesus eliminated God's law?

By no means.

Here are two things to consider:

1) "law of commandments" might refer to the ceremonial laws that Gentiles could not participate in because they were not circumcised.

These ceremonial laws were fulfilled in Jesus Christ who became our perfect sacrifice.

Thus, he abolished those practices by fulfilling them, so that we do not need the blood of bulls to be forgiven.

2) Or Paul might be referring to obedience to the law as a way of salvation.

Many Jews thought they could be saved through obeying the law.

But the Good News of the gospel revealed that salvation is only by faith in Christ Jesus alone.

The point in both cases is: no human work can get anyone saved.

Only through Christ's work are we saved.

This is why, in Christ's death and resurrection, Gentiles and Jews have both been reconciled to God.

We have been made into one people of God, one body of Christ, one church, through the cross of Jesus Christ.

This is how one commentator puts it:

"Christ in His death was slain; But the slain was a slayer too."

When Christ was killed, He killed the enmity that separated us from God and from one another.

Yes, we have differences.

But having Christ in common means that we can experience unity in our diversity.

Allow me please to summarize what we have seen in verses 13 through 18:

First, "Peace is a person before it is an activity.

Peace is a person before it is a sermon.

It is because Christ is the embodiment of God's peace that Christ can make peace as well as proclaim peace."

Second, we are no longer enemies of God and of one another because the wall of hostility has been removed.

Now, we who believe are one in Christ.

Third, this is the work of the Trinity.

Verse 18 reads:

"For through him [Jesus Christ] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

It requires the community of the Trinity to reconcile our communities.

We need a supernatural intervention.

To have peace with God, we need to be first restored in God's presence, through His Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This brings us to our third and last point:

### **Point 3: What we have now become (verses 19-22).**

Maybe an anecdote will help us understand this point.

As a student for 4 years here in the United States, my visa is "nonimmigrant alien."

Maybe, like me, you do not have permanent residency in this country.

Maybe you are waiting for the US government to finish processing your status.

The point Paul makes in these verses is that in Christ, you already have the best status ever.

Friends, I have lived in foreign countries for almost 10 years now.

I have felt like a stranger in many places.

But I have never felt like a stranger in the church.

This is because in the church, Christ has provided us with the highest citizenship ever, the heavenly citizenship.

This is better than a Green Card some of you are eagerly waiting for.

This is better than having an American citizenship.

All these statuses are limited to national borders and serve to divide people.

But the heavenly citizenship that Christ has acquired for us transforms "nonimmigrant aliens" into citizens.

Listen again to Ephesians 2:19.

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,"

Because of what Christ has done for you, no matter what ethnic group you are from, you are no longer:

"Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless."

Now you are children of God.

The church is your home state.

You have spiritual brothers and sisters from all over the world.

You have hope for the future, and God is your Father.

Because of Christ, we are all "fellow citizens" of the heavenly city that was:

20 "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,"

Paul doesn't mean that the apostles and the prophets are the pillars of the church in themselves.

Rather, this refers to what they taught, professed, and confessed.

The church is built on Biblical doctrine, on the truth of Scripture.

The prophets are representatives of the Old Testament period and the Apostles the representatives of the New Testament.

The prophets talked about Christ's coming, and the apostles preached the Christ who had already come.

So, the church is founded on truth concerning Christ and His work.

This is why the apostle Paul calls Christ Jesus the cornerstone of the church.

Because He is the central message and figure of the Bible.

Christ came to solve the problem of sin that both Old Testament and New Testament people could not solve.

After making peace, now Jesus is our anchor, on whom we can stake our whole eternity.

Verse 21 says:

21 "in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord."

Christ is like the ligament that joins bones in the human body for His people.

He connects and holds us together.

For One Voice to experience unity, we will need to rely on Christ.

Why? Because, in Him we can find true peace, reconciliation, unity and harmony.

We have differences of opinion, culture, and background.

But all those things are not as important as the unity that we have in Christ.

This is a unity that transcends our national and cultural boundaries, even time itself.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we will be always one--both now and in the life to come.

In John 17:20-21, Christ prayed that the church would be one even as He and the Father are one.

And He continues to pray for us, that we would experience what Paul describes in Ephesians 2:22.

22 "In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

This verse tells us that we cannot maintain unity on our own.

We need the Holy Spirit to sustain this unity that Christ accomplishes.

The same God who makes peace with us is the same God who helps us maintain peace.

May Christ's Spirit fill our hearts and minds as we strive to be peacemakers here at One Voice.

Peacemaking and unity require prayer and effort.

Some of us at One Voice are from non-western countries.

We feel afraid to tell the truth in the name of love and the preservation of relationships.

We sometimes confuse "peace-faking" with peacemaking.

On the other side, some of our American brothers and sisters are very direct with the truth.

Their directness can destroy relationships because of their bluntness.

But neither of these approaches will help us be peacemakers.

Children of God are neither called to be peace-fakers nor relationship-destroyers.

We are called to be peace-makers, who speak the truth in love as we read in Ephesians 4:15.

As the body of Christ, we need true love and loving truth.

This is because love without truth is hypocrisy, and truth without love is brutality.

This is the new perspective that peacemakers are to have.

And our Lord Jesus gives peacemakers a promise in Matthew 5:9.

He says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

In our culture today, everybody wants and demands to be understood.

Yet, no one wants to understand the other.

That is not how peaceful people live.

Peaceful people seek peace whether they are understood or not.

This is the new attitude that we need as blessed children of God.

We need this if we are going to worship the Lord in one voice.

And only the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit can help us do this.

Let's pray that we will be peacemakers.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we thank you for the work of reconciliation accomplished in Christ.

We thank you that as a people redeemed by Christ's work on the cross, we can gather here today.


Lord, we pray that we would pursue peace with one another even in hard times.

We pray that we would proclaim the peace that Christ has accomplished for us to the lost wherever you place us.

Please, keep us united as fellow citizens in Your church.

Helps us to rely on the Holy Spirit as we do this because on our own, we will fail.

And it is in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit that we pray, Amen!

 One Voice Fellowship