

The Devil Divides, God Unites

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[0 : 0 0] Ephesians chapter 2 could well be describing in great and wonderful terms your own testimony.

If you're anything like me, this is quite an apt description of what you once were and what you now are and what the Lord has done. And we've been talking recently about what it means to be a church, what it means to be a family, what it means to be a part of that family, and really how the door into that family is Christ and what He has done. And if He has made you a part of that family, you are a part of that family. And sometimes it's just a matter of being known, being recognized and stated as a part of that family. And so, we've been talking about that.

We've been talking about what it means to be a member or a citizen of His kingdom or a son or daughter in His family. And if you have been rescued by Jesus, and yet you are not perhaps a part of a church or known and stated and recognized as a part of a church, it's not that that thing, you know, whether it's a process or whatever it is in a church, it's not that that makes you this thing that you already are. But rather, it's like when you're in a foreign country, if you lose your passport and you go to the embassy, and the embassy need to do their checks to ensure that you are, in fact, a citizen, and they do their checks, and they confirm that you're a citizen, and they hand you a passport, that doesn't make you a citizen. You already are a citizen, but you need to be checked.

You need to go through that process to be recognized as the fact that you already are. And that's the same in churches. Whether you're becoming a Christian or whether you're moving from one church to another, it's like going into an embassy, and they are confirming your faith and saying, okay, you are a part of the body. Now, join this family. And so, I would say that if you are not already that in this family, then come to us and join this family. We want to recognize you as part of the body. And some of you have asked to be recognized as part of the body, and we'll go through that. But if you've not yet done that, and speak to us. So, let me read of what it means to be part of this family, the things that Christ has done to make this family. Ephesians chapter 2.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

[3 : 1 9] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he has loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ. By grace, you have been saved.

And he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It's the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast. We are all his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Therefore, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision, by what is called the circumcision, which was made in the flesh by hands. Remember that you were, at that time you were separated from Christ. You were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and you were strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

That was us at one time. But now in Christ, 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 that he might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility, this hostility that once existed between us. And he came and preached to peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 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, fellow citizens, with the saints and members of the household of God, your family, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being himself the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are being built together into a dwelling place by God, for God, by the Spirit. Become a family where this once dividing wall existed.

[6 : 06] We have been brought together by Christ and his blood. Heavenly Father, please speak to us through your Spirit that we might understand the work of Christ and what he has done and what he is doing.

And please, by your Spirit, move in our hearts, each one of us, to recognize Jesus and to come together in him. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, the last few weeks I've been using the illustration of chess to help us understand these moves that God is making in the book of Exodus. And today I actually want to use American football. I don't know if any of you are familiar. I want to use American football to illustrate not the moves of God, but actually the moves that the devil makes. I want to use American football. I'm not saying that American football is of the devil, but it's going to illustrate something here. So American football is actually quite like chess. If you've seen anything of American football, you know it's quite stop and start and stop and start. But it's actually like chess, where the game of soccer and rugby is a bit more fluid. American football has these tactical plays, and it's all about gaining ground. And so it's about advancing all the way to the other side, little by little, using tactics. And so one of the things that you'll hear about American football, if you're watching it, you'll hear that coaches and different people will say that they use a scheme. The American footballs use a scheme in order to set out these tactics. And they have code words. They've got these code words they use, and they've got signals, these hand signals, where they do these things to their teammates to let them know that the scheme that they're running to fight against the other side. And so they'll use code words, signals, names, phrases to communicate their tactics. And you'll see their coaches talking on a headset to the team. And they'll do that. They'll have their playbook, and they'll hold it up to their mouth, and they'll talk in their headset. Because they actually, and this is without a word of a lie, if there are lip readers on the other team who can decode their tactics, they want to cover their mouth. And so they do that, and they tell them, we're going to run this play now. And so they do that.

And just the other week, right, the season has kicked off. And just the other week, there were these two teams playing the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, right, and the Minnesota Vikings. They were playing American football, and something happened. Because halfway through the game, by halftime, the quarterback, he's like the team captain, the quarterback of the Buccaneers figured out and decoded all the signals from the defense of the other team. And when you figure that out, well, you can just go on and win. And so he figured out all their signals, and he was able to say to his teammates, when they do this, this is what they're trying to do. And when they do this, this is what they're trying to do. When they make this hand signal, this is what they're trying to do. And so we are wise to that. And they're going to try and stop us over here, but we know what they're playing at, so we can go around there.

And they went on to beat them, because they figured out their scheme. They figured out their scheme. You see, Ephesians chapter 6 says that the devil has schemes against us. The devil has schemes. He wants to stop you getting on in life. He wants to stop the church, this church. He wants to stop this advancing. He wants to stop God's purposes from moving forward in the world. And he wants to stop our progress to know the Lord and to live in his light. And believe me, the schemes of the devil are really, really effective, really effective. But if you can figure them out and work together as a team, then as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2.11, we won't be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs. You see, if you're ignorant of his designs, you can easily be outwitted by him.

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not up here trying to say, I've figured out some sneaky wee hidden evil tactic from this weird devil worshipping group. No. Many of the devil schemes are very well known in the world. Very well known. Sometimes, however, we forget that that's what he's up to, and we just like to fight with one another. And oftentimes, the things that the devil schemes to do are just a smoke screen.

[11 : 00] A smoke screen. He's trying to distract us from seeing what he's actually up to. But either way, like in the game of American football, it's one thing to know the scheme, and it's another thing to do something about it. If that guy had said, I've figured out the scheme of this other team, and his teammates are like, great, are we going to change what we're going to do?

And he's, nah. Nah, we'll just let them do it. They wouldn't have done anything. It's one thing to know the scheme. It's a different thing to do something about it. And so today, this isn't so much about trying to uncover some secret scheme. It's more trying to encourage us to always adjust accordingly.

We need to act accordingly. Don't get caught in a trap. And so, very briefly, let me tell you the history about one of the most devastating schemes of the devil, which is to divide and conquer. To divide.

And so, in Genesis 1, all the way back in the beginning, Genesis 1, God is the creator of all that is good. You can't read Genesis 1 without coming to that conclusion. God made this, and he saw that it was good. And he made a unique role in man to have a unity between man and God.

And he also made man, both male and female, out of the one in order that they would be designed to be united together as one. And so, at the outset of God's good creation, there's a unity between God and man, a vertical unity, and there's a horizontal unity between man and wife, humanity with one another. There's a unity between heaven and earth, and a unity between creation.

[12 : 44] And so, this is how it goes. There is both a vertical unity and a horizontal unity, and it's good. Now, Genesis chapter 3, the devil comes, and his first tactic is to break the unity between God and man. Break the unity between God and man. Set a divide between God and man for man to distrust God.

And he breaks this unity. He breaks it. And then the next chapter, Genesis chapter 4, if you know the story, it's Cain and Abel, and he drives a wedge between them two brothers.

And he kills his brother. You see, he has to first break the unity between God and man before he can break the unity between man and man, because as long as you're loving God, you will love your neighbor. But as soon as you break that down, oh, it creates a world of fighting.

And boy, do we know it. Do we not? Do we not know in our families, marriages, nations, world, do we not know the result of this? That man just disregards God, and then man starts fighting with one another to no end. It's the devil's tactic to divide and conquer. First, he gets people to destroy their relationship with God, and then second, he gets them to destroy their relationship with each other. If he can't break the vertical unity, he can't break the horizontal unity.

And that's why the first and greatest command is to love God with everything. And then the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. Because as long as you're loving God, you're going to love your neighbor the way that you should. Now, we are living in a world that absolutely knows the effects of this scheme all too well, both the divide between man and God and the divide between man and man.

[14 : 44] The devil divides. That's one of his great schemes. Don't fall for the trap. And so, in Ephesians chapter 6, Paul says, put on the whole armor of God that you might be able to stand against the devil's schemes.

We do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but by against rulers, against authorities, against cosmic powers, over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Put on the whole armor of God that you might be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. And then he goes on to say, we don't fight. We don't wrestle. We don't battle with flesh and blood.

Don't fall for the trap. And so, let me tell you a story, okay, just to illustrate this. And I'm sure you can think in your mind that we've all got a story like this. I used to work in the care industry. I used to support adults with learning disabilities. And I used to support this boy who was in a wheelchair.

He had autism. And it was a two-to-one, so me and this other worker supported him. And we were going down the town center in East Kilbride. And we were getting this taxi that we always got every week.

[15 : 53] So, there were three. There were me, my other colleague, the boy that we were supporting, and the taxi driver. So, there was four of us. And we got to the town center and we pulled into this space. But there wasn't any more disabled spaces. So, it was quite a tight thing. Now, it's fine because it was the back door that opened to get the wheelchair out. But the taxi driver kind of accidentally grazed the car next to it, trying to get in. And somebody who was sitting in a disabled bay, a young guy, put his head out the window and said, I saw what you've done. And he started shouting aggressively. He started shouting at him. And it just made us turn around and think, well, this wouldn't have happened if you weren't sitting in that space. And he didn't have a badge. He wasn't disabled or anything like that. It was just a young guy with his girlfriend sitting in this space, wanting to shout his mouth off. And so, me and my colleague get out to take the boy out in his wheelchair. My colleague's like about seven foot. He's like Goliath. And there's me and there's this taxi driver and there's a whole bunch of us. And this young guy just starts shouting. And he's like, what are you looking at? You want to go? And stuff like that. And it was just the most bizarre thing in the world. This young guy sitting in a disabled bay that he shouldn't have been sitting in, shouting at a taxi driver and these other guys wanting to fight them.

It was just the strangest thing ever, you know? And eventually a parking attendant came and the guy just went off. But the thing is, right, now when things like this happen, it gets in here, doesn't it? And you think, oh, the things I should have said, the things I should have done to that guy. How dare he? How dare he? The gall of that guy to do that.

I mean, me and my Goliath friend should have just pummeled him. You need to just take a step to the side and see past the flesh and blood and see what's going on.

Because usually there's always a devil scheming behind there, trying to create strife between humans and try to get in your head. He doesn't want you going about your day honoring Christ.

It's the last thing he wants. And so, folks, the devil schemes. Whether you're a Christian or not, the devil schemes and he doesn't want you to have a bright future. He wants you to abandon God, not love God. And he wants you to hate your neighbor, not love your neighbor. And so, when these things in life, and I've got a million stories that are just the most bizarre things, but when you take a step to the side and you think, ah, scheming devil just wanting me to fight with my fellow human. Scheming devil wanting me to go about my business and disregard God's commands to love him and love others. Don't fall for the trap. And the thing is, because the devil doesn't need to destroy one person at a time, does he? If he can get people destroying each other, job done.

[19 : 06] Think about it. It's not like the devil just hates people. We sometimes forget that. The devil hates God. And he wants to undermine God's entire design and purpose by getting God's good creation to destroy itself. Now, let me ask you a question. How do you start a forest fire? Do you need to go around lighting every single tree on fire? There's one tree. There's the next tree. There's the next tree.

You don't need to do that, do you? Just set one tree on fire, and it will burn the trees around it. And then their trees will burn the trees around them. Now, do you not see that the devil is doing that with people? Set one person on fire, and they will burn the people around them. It's a scheme.

It's a scheme of the devil. He wants us fighting each other all the time. And a large part of the problem is we fall for it. We just fall for it. We fight over stupid things.

He wants us fighting. And we in the church, we should be wise to this. But all we see is flesh and blood. It's a smoke screen. It's a distraction for what the devil is really trying to do.

And so we need to get into the habit of seeing past the flesh and blood, seeing past the ridiculous things that we argue about, whether it's church, whether it's in marriages, whether it's siblings, whether it's your family. We need to get past and see past the ridiculous things that we're fighting about, because it's all a smoke screen for this scheme of the devil.

[20 : 41] Flesh and blood are just like the signals in American football, and we need to see past it and see the scheme behind it. Remember the wristbands, WWJD? What would Jesus do?

It's a good thing to think about what would Jesus do. Probably also be a good thing to think to yourself, what would the devil want you to do? In July of 1940, a very clever guy called C.S. Lewis wrote to his brother about an idea that he'd had for a book. He said that the book would be called as One Devil to Another. And it would consist of letters from an elderly retired devil to a younger devil who had just started work on his first patient. And the idea was to explore the psychology of temptation from the point of view of a demon trying to tempt a Christian. And he went on to write the book, and many of you will know the book as The Screwtape Letters. It's a terrific book, and it just uncovers the scheme of the devil. If the devil schemes to divide generally, how much more will he seek to divide Christians? And particularly to divide Christians over peripheral and different issues. And so, in the book, this is what C.S. Lewis writes. He illustrates how a devil might go about scheming to divide you, right? And this is what he says. Okay, so this is the part of a demon trying to train his nephew at how to tempt a Christian. And this is what the demon says. I think I warned you before that if your patient can't be kept out of church, he ought to at least be violently attached to some party within it. I don't mean on really doctrinal issues. About those, the more lukewarm he is, the better. It isn't the doctrines in which we chiefly depend to produce our malice. The real fun is working up hatred between those who say Mass and those who say Holy Communion. All the purely indifferent things, candles and clothes and whatnot, they are all an admirable ground for our activities.

Isn't that interesting? He wants us fighting over the stupidest of things. If you've been a Christian for a long time, tell me you haven't seen this kind of thing happening. I dare say we've all played our part from time to time. But one of the things that you see from the Bible, one of the things you learn from the Bible and history and experience is there's always some kind of threat against the church, always some kind of threat against God's people. And either it's persecution from the outside or it's pride and division from the inside. And I wonder if the devil uses one more when the other is not present. In times of less persecution, do we just find more to divide over? In fact, I'd say that one of the things we're so often unaware of is just how major a threat to the church division is.

We can read about persecution and it scares the life out of us because of how serious and devastating it is. But seldom do we think that divisions in the church are being used just as much as a scheme of the devil. If serious persecution broke out tomorrow, you bet we would be praying. You bet we would be praying. But how serious do we take division and how often do we pray about it? In Ephesians 2, you can see that what the devil does, he encourages this dividing wall of hostility.

Dividing wall of hostility, that's like his idea. But God, what does he do? He breaks it down in the flesh of Christ. He makes one new man, one body out of this too. One family, members of the household of God, joined together. And so the last place that we should expect to find dividing walls is inside the household of God. It's not fitting for those who have been made part of God's family to do this. It's not worthy of the gospel that saved you to be so divided. And so the reason that I think this is important to remember is because, like the American football illustration, the defense runs a scheme to stop the other team advancing.

[25 : 14] It's about when you're advancing. And this church is growing little by little. It's progressing. It's advancing here and there. And so we mustn't be ignorant of the devil's schemes because he's going to try and stop us from getting along. He's going to try and attack any unity we have in the gospel.

And he's going to do it about the peripheral things. He's going to try and get us distracted. Let me be clear. The devil does not want this church to grow. And he doesn't want you to grow.

The devil doesn't want this family to get along. And the devil does not want God to be glorified in this family. He doesn't want to hear the name of Christ being honored in this family.

But let me also tell you this. If you love Christ, greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. And so what does it look like not to be caught in this trap? What does it look like to have the spirit within us outwit the devil that's in the world? Let me give you a clue what it looks like. It is cross-shaped. It doesn't mean power in the traditional sense of power. It doesn't mean winning in the traditional sense of winning. And it doesn't mean getting your own way. It looks like humility. It looks like charity. It looks like unity. Not at the expense of truth, but let us not fight over non-essential things. For instance, Paul says in Ephesians chapter 4, 26, be angry, but do not sin.

Don't let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. See how he connects those things? And your anger and your disagreement with people, all those feelings that make you want to win the argument, all those feelings that are not considering the betterment of the other party, Paul says those things give the devil an opportunity. Now there are some things we ought to fight for.

[27 : 15] There are some things we ought to divide over when it comes to the gospel truth. Two things that have been a major threat in the history of the church, legalism and liberalism. Legalism happens when people insist on rules like a heavy yoke, often without much love or grace. And half of them don't even matter, to be honest.

That's legalism. It's moralism. When people insist on you follow these rules without grace or love, and half of the rules don't actually really matter that much. And liberalism. Liberalism happens when people insist on unity, but at the expense of truth. We can't let this Jesus truth get in the way of our unity. That's liberalism. We're going to water the gospel down or push it to the side.

But let me tell you this, when your unity is not in something firm and solid like the rock, it doesn't last. Look at it in the world. People think they're united and love is love, yet they're all fighting one another. Unity doesn't last when it's not grounded in Christ.

And so, legalism and liberalism, we should fight against those things, because they offer false hope. They don't offer true hope. Love is not simply all you need, but neither is rules. Jesus is what we need. Jesus said both, I am the way and the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me. And yet he also said, my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Follow me. We hold firm to the true faith. We are devoted to the apostles' teaching, to the apostles' doctrine, to the creed, which itself is an amazing thing.

Get a copy of the Sword magazine. David Andrew wrote a wonderful thing, a striking thing, that the twelve apostles could so easily have become the twelve factions. Couldn't they? The twelve opinions. It's an absolute miracle of God that they didn't. Because everywhere else in the world, when you get a group of folks like that, that's what happens. How much does that happen if you've ever been in a relationship with someone? The two doesn't become one. The two becomes two opinions.

[29 : 37] The twelve factions. The only reason they didn't become the twelve factions is the power of Christ to unite them in himself. So let's never hold to some faction. But nevertheless, let's stand firm in the gospel truth of who Jesus is and what he did. We hold the Bible to be the inerrant word of God, and we will teach the whole counsel of God. We will unashamedly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We will preach Christ and him crucified, and we will preach salvation in no other name than Jesus, because there isn't any. It would be offering false hope to do so otherwise. We will tell of the need of people to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus, and we will tell of the light and life that is in his name. But let's not fight by God's grace. Let's avoid fighting over peripheral things. The only time we should fight over decisions is if it tampers with the gospel truth.

If any decision promotes legalism or liberalism, then have at it. I'll fight against it, and I hope you will. But other than that, let's not divide over peripheral things, because falling out over these things is falling for the devil's traps. Let's not form factions. Let's not erect dividing walls. Let's not insist on our own ways and our anger. Let's not take a posture of pride, because that would give the devil a foothold.

In the church, let us speak and act in ways that promote love and unity in the gospel, not division. Paul says in Romans 12, after talking about the body being one body, he says, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. And so, being contentious and cantankerous doesn't do anyone any good. It only threatens the unity of the church. Paul, Jesus said, love one another as I have loved you. And Paul says, be of the same mind, have the same love, be in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.

In humility. In humility. In humility, count others as more significant as yourself. You're never going to be able to do that unless you do it in humility. And so, as I said before, it's the scheme of the devil.

[32 : 09] It's the thing designed to stop your progress. It's one thing to know it. It's another thing to do something about it. And so, you don't need to look far to see how powerful the devil's schemes are in the world.

But when we know that this is what he's up to, if we're willing to do something about it, we have something far more powerful. Something far more powerful. The spirit that is in you is greater than the spirit in the world.

What he has saved you and united you in is far stronger than anything that you can be divided over. And this might sound anticlimactic, but we completely underestimate the power of humility.

We really do as humans. We totally underestimate the serious power there is in humility. The power of humility against pride.

The power of forgiveness against sin. The power of love and grace against anger and selfishness.

[33 : 19] You can't stop it. You cannot stop it. Paul says, don't let evil defeat you, but defeat evil by doing good. And we often don't realize how devastating humility is to the prince of darkness.

Remember, pride is his trademark from the beginning. And as long as you take a humble position, he can't touch you. He can't touch you.

The drumbeat of love is sacrifice. And when you choose that over getting your own way, he can't stop you. And so let me ask you this, right, wherever you are.

Apart from the Christian essentials, the very things that unite us, who Jesus is and what he's done, apart from the Christian essentials, who here comes to this church specifically because they believe that the Baptist tradition is the best and only way that there ever was?

Nobody. Nobody. Or who here comes here because, boy, these hymns, these songs that we sing, can't find any better ones in the world.

[34 : 23] Nobody's coming for that. Or who here comes because they think I'm the best preacher around? I know that I'm not. Some people fall asleep, by the way.

I know that you appreciate the word. And that's it. It's not me. It's the truth of God that you resonate with. It's the love and spirit of Jesus that you feel from the family who offer you welcome without judgment.

That's the spirit of Christ that you resonate with. The truth of God that you resonate with. There's nothing to do with these things. We're not united in these things.

People come here for all sorts of backgrounds and denominations and countries, ethnicities and preferences. And yet none of those things unite us.

The thing that unites us is Christ and nothing more and nothing less. And so Paul says, Walk in a manner worthy of your calling, which you've been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

[35 : 35] Because there is one God and father of all.

Who is over all and through all and in all. We're united in that one. And the devil does scheme, but he's already defeated. He is already defeated.

His work has been undone by Christ. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil, says John. And so let me say this.

When folks in the world and in church act like there are dividing walls, it makes the devil look like he's winning. But he's already lost.

But if you speak and act like there are no dividing walls, then you are really showing the reality of what Jesus has done and what it means to be in the household of God.

[36 : 37] What a wonderful thing. When you act and speak with one another like there are absolutely no dividing walls, then you are manifesting the reality of what Jesus is doing in this world.

And it's extraordinary. David Andrews said that it was the extraordinary love of Jesus, like a spiritual force of gravity, that held these difficult men in the peaceable orbit of heaven.

And let it do the same for us. Let it do the same for us. That the world may see Christ and find their way to him as well.

If you have love for one another, then the world will know that you are my disciples. Stephen, I want to ask if you could do me a wee favor. Could you put up Matthew chapter 6?

Matthew 6, verse 9 to 13. And this is the Lord's Prayer.

[37 : 42] And as a sign of our unity. You see, one of the things is, what we're all looking for only exists in the kingdom of God.

All the things that humans hope for, whether they know it or not, they only exist in the kingdom of God. And so it's right and fitting to pray for his kingdom to come and his will be done.

Because in the end, that's the only place where light and life and love and grace will ever be found. And the glory and light of Christ and in his kingdom. And so, if you love the Lord, if you are a citizen of his kingdom, then let us pray together.

Let us end this time in the Word here just now and pray together the Lord's Prayer. If you know it, then just go for it. The words are up on the screen.

Let me lead us and join with me. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[38 : 53] Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Amen. Amen. Well, I believe we're going to sing a song now. And in doing so, we're going to...