Community – God’s New People

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[0:00] It's a description of our life in rebellion against God, not unlike what Adam and Eve were like in the garden. It says we're spiritually dead, that we're without life, without hope, separated, excluded from the community that we can have with God.

In fact, he tells us that it is a serious condition. Look at the end of verse 3. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.
You see, when we reject God, we face his rejection of us. When we push God out of the centre, he pushes us out.
We face his judgement. But as we've been saying, God has this cosmic plan to bring people back into community with himself.
So look at verse 4. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions.
[1:13] It is by grace that you have been saved. God has seen the mess, the hostility and the division in the world, but he doesn't ignore it and run away from it.

He reaches down and he intervenes into our lives. Jesus came to take our rebellion on himself and suffer the rejection that we deserve so that we could be welcomed back into community with the Father.
He rescued us so that we could be welcomed back into our lives. He rescued us so that we could be welcomed back into our lives. He saved us so that we could enjoy life with him under his perfect loving rule.
Now, if you and I are going to experience this salvation, if we're going to experience community with God, then the only response to that is faith.
Look at verses 8 and 9. For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves.
[2:17] Faith, that is, is a gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast. You see, it's very clear, isn't it?

It's not the church that saves me. It's faith in Christ that saves me. It's not my membership or my baptism that saves me.
It's my faith in Christ. Yes, my baptism is an outward expression of my faith in Jesus. But it is faith that counts.
Each one of us have been born outside of the community of God. We're all born outside of the church. But through our faith in Christ, we are now restored into community with God.
So first, the church is saved by Christ. Now, the other side of the coin is this.
[3:23] We're saved by Christ, but we are also gathered into community. We're saved individually, but we are always saved into the community of God's people.

So have a look at verse 12, chapter 2. Again, he's looking back to the past. Verse 12. Remember that at that time in the past, you were separate from Christ.
You were excluded from citizenship in Israel. Foreigners to the covenants of the promise. Without hope and without God in the world.
So that exclusion of being apart from God. But now, look at verse 13. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away, have now been brought near through the blood of Christ.
And as we'll see, what it's telling us is, we're not just saved into the community, to be into the community with God, but we are also saved into the community of God's people.
[4:35] In other words, church is not just a group of individuals all doing their own thing. We are a family united together in Christ.

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Excluded, but now brought near by Christ to be a new people. Two things under this gathered community. First, we are one united people.
Verse 14. For he, that's Jesus himself, is our peace. He has made the two one. And has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.
Now, the people he's writing to here, the particular division that he has in mind is between the Jew and the Gentile. Different cultures. But he says, between you, I am now making peace.
There was division, but now I'm going to break that dividing wall of hostility. And I'm going to bring you together in Christ. Now, we know our experience in life today is that division and hostility exist everywhere.
[5:44] Between all kinds of people groups. Even between different social classes. We exclude and we reject people all the time. Well, because they're not like me. But what Christ has done is to break down all those barriers that divide.

Look at the end of verse 15. Pick it up in the middle of verse 15. His purpose was to create in himself one new people out of the two, thus making peace.
And in this one body in Christ, to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. So he takes people from different sides, who are hostile, who don't get on, and brings them together to create peace and to bring about a new kind of people.
Recently, the four provinces of Ireland, Munster, Leinster, Connacht and Ulster, they all played each other in rugby. I think it was last weekend. They played as rivals and enemies.
And if you watched the match, you would have seen them. There was no love between them. They were thumping the living daylights out of each other. But then, those same players from those same four teams all get called to play for Ireland, the national team.
[7:19] And we've seen them, Ireland, standing together on the pitch, shoulder to shoulder, as one united team, under one anthem, under the one green jersey.

The barrier that divides has now been broken down and they are now united as one to serve one purpose. Now, in a much more significant and in an eternal way, this is what Christ does for the world.
He takes people from different backgrounds. And each one of us here has got a different story. We come from different countries. We come from different families.
We've got different cultures. We've got different ideas of looking at the world. But yet, he takes us all from our different places and walks of life.
And he says, I unite you together in Christ. Because the one thing we've got in common is, we're all rebels. But he says, I'm going to take that rebellion on myself.
[8:23] And I'm going to bring peace to you. And peace to one another. So, if we're saved by Christ, our identity is no longer Irish or British.

Our identity is not about our colour, whether we're black or whether we're white. Our identity is not whether we say I'm Catholic or Protestant, rich or poor.
Our identity is now that we are a new people, united under Christ. Look what it says again in the middle of verse 15.
His purpose was to create in himself one new people, out of the two, thus making peace.
So, if you're a Christian here this morning, your identity is not in a culture, is not in your background.
[9:26] Your new identity is one that is in Christ, where we now become a new kind of people. But we're more than just one united people.

We are one spirit-filled family. Look at the illustration he gives us in verse 19. Consequently, because of this work of Christ, you're no longer foreigners and aliens, people who are outsiders, but fellow citizens.
Your passport is Christ. You are God's people and members of God's household. Literally, you are members of God's family.
Brothers and sisters of each other. The Lord Jesus is our brother. And God is our Father. That is God's design.
My sister has a sign up in her kitchen. And if you're a family and you have children, you'll probably relate to it. The sign says this.
[10:34] This is not a hotel. We are a family. In other words, mum and dad are not here to give and get what the children demand. We're a family. We're a family.

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We serve and care for one another. You don't just walk in and walk out and do as you please and get what you like. It's much more than that. And that's what it means to live in the community of God's people.
We're not just a random collection of individuals who just turn up and do their own related things throughout the week and throughout the day. No, we're family.
Brothers and sisters seeking to support and share and serve one another. We say, well, how do we experience this family life? What's it look like?
Well, the way we experience it is, is to start living out our familiness. And that is we start behaving and living as family where we get involved, where we're committed.
[11:36] You see, if you see church as simply just one meeting that you attend once a week, then we'll never truly know the love and care of God's people.

If church is just something that you attend whenever it doesn't interfere with some other thing that you're doing in your life, then we're never ever going to know community as God intends.
Family life means doing life together 24-7 in the good times and the hard times. It means that we're a people who work through the messiness of life with each other.
That we forgive each other when we fail each other and let each other down. Where we support one another. He gives us a wonderful picture and description of this.
Have a look at chapter 4. He gives these wonderful pictures of what this family life is like. I'm just going to read some verses for you.
[12:40] Have a look at verse 29. This is what it looks like. Verse 29 of chapter 4.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths. But only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.
That it may benefit those who listen. That's good, isn't it? Or have a look at verse 32. Be kind and compassionate to one another.
Forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love. Just as Christ loved us.
And gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Or have a look down at verse 4.
[13:44] There should be no obscenity or foolish talk, coarse joking, which are out of place. But rather, thanksgiving.

Verse 8. You were once darkness, but now you're light in the Lord. Live as children of light. For the fruit of light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.
And find out what pleases the Lord. Isn't that a wonderful description and picture of the family of God's people? Well, you're saying, I sure like the sound of that.
But it's not always what I experience. And that is true. So let's be measured in our expectations. He's telling us this is what it should look like.
But we also need to recognise that we are not yet the perfect family. So go back to chapter 2. Verse 22. He's been talking about the church as family.
[14:53] Now he changes the metaphor slightly. And talks about a building, a temple. A people who come together. Verse 22. Let me read. In him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

So God has made us a family. But God is in the process of building us up and into a family. So we are not yet the perfect family.
We're not the finished article. He is still working in us and through us. So we will struggle with our sinful nature. That means with our sinful nature we'll fail each other.
At times we'll disappoint each other. We'll even hurt each other because we say the wrong thing. But God by his spirit is working on us and in us and building us together like blocks in a wall together to be the family that he calls us to be.
So he says this is what it looks like. And this is what I'm building you towards. That's why we are to be compassionate to one another.
[16:11] Forgiving of one another. Seeking to build one another up. So what are we saying in all of this? Well, if I am saved by Christ, that's one side of the coin.

And the other side of the coin is I am saved into the community of Christ. Yes, we're saved individually. But we are always gathered into a family.

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So if I am a Christian, the church is not something that I somehow later on decide, I wonder if I'll join it.
No, I am saved into the church by Christ. You can't separate the two. Christianity is not a lone experience. It is a united family from all walks of life serving, sharing and supporting together.
And so if you are a Christian here today and you're not baptised, well, baptism is that outward expression that I belong to Christ and that I belong to the church family.
[17:19] Membership. Membership is that outward expression of saying, yes, I'm committed to the family that Christ has saved me into.

And if I am not yet a member, then that is something that we should be thinking through seriously. If I am saved by Christ, I am saved into the community of Christ.
They cannot be separated. So let me ask us a question. If we are Christians, how are you seeking to live out being in God's family today?
Do you wait for others to serve you? Do you sit at home waiting for somebody to come and visit and complain when they don't? Do you sit here on a Sunday morning thinking, well, I wonder if somebody's going to do this for me instead of first going to them?
We are to be an outward focused people, not looking at myself, but seeking to serve and encourage and help one another. So we are saved by Christ.
[18:29] We are gathered into community. And then the last part is, we are displaying God's eternal purpose. Look at chapter 3, verse 6.

Chapter 3, verse 6. This mystery, this great big plan of God, this cosmic plan of God, is that through the gospel, the Gentiles, that is those who are not Jews, are heirs together with Israel, those who are Jews.
So Gentiles, Jews, Irish, English, European, wherever we may come from, through Christ, we are members together of one body and sharers together in the promise of Jesus Christ.
He unites us together as one people. There's no inferiority, no superiority. We share in the promises together. We all have access to God.
We're all equally loved and treasured without distinction. That is what Christ does for us. But that's not the end of it. There's a purpose for all of this. Look at verse 10.
[19:38] And here's where the purpose comes. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose, which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What a statement. God's wisdom, God's cosmic plan, is now on display through the church.
If you like, the church is God's display piece to the whole world to say, this is what I am doing. This is how I am uniting people together so that they live under my rule.
So as we look at a people, a diverse bunch, a motley crew as we are here, united through Christ, as we watch outsiders incorporated into God's family, as we experience a forgiven people forgiving one another, as we hear of hostilities being healed and grace for the broken, as people see the church in action, they see God's eternal purpose at work.
This, the local church, is God's display piece to a broken, divided and hostile world to say, come and see what I can do.
[21:19] Of course we're not blowing our own trumpet to say that we're perfect. We are not. It's not because we are better. We are not.

It is simply because Christ takes messy, broken, rebellious people like you and me with all our flaws and with all our failures.
And by his grace, he unites us together in love to serve him, enjoy him, and to serve one another as family.
God's new community on display to the world. We're going to pray together now. And I want you to leave your Bibles open because we're going to use the prayer in Ephesians 3.
So if you've just shut it, open again. Here's a wonderful prayer to pray for the church. Ephesians chapter 3, starting at verse 14 through to verse 21.
[22:28] So let us pray this. So the person you're sitting beside, people around you, this is what you are praying for one another. So let's read together this prayer.

For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

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I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.
And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.
[23:44] Amen. Well, let's join together as God's people, as his church, as we sing together to pray for God's blessing, his renewing, his work in our lives.

Let's stand together as we sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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