

Ephesians 2:11-22

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[0 : 00] Welcome, everybody. So, one thing we saw in some of the scripture reading today, we read Genesis 1, a little bit of Genesis 1, a little bit of Genesis 2, a little bit of Genesis 3.

So we see a world that was created good. God created man. Man walked with God in the garden. He created a woman for man. Man rejoiced in the creation of woman. And they stood before each other naked and unashamed.

So there is no brokenness between that relationship. There is just acceptance and love and a lack of shame. So this is the world that was created. Then we see Adam and Eve sin against God.

And kind of the fallout of that is both alienation from God, alienation from His promises, but also alienation from one another. What's the first thing Adam does? He blames Eve. God, this woman that you gave me, she gave me this fruit.

And then part of the curse is Eve is going to feel a desire to rule over her husband, but her husband will actually rule over her.

[1 : 03] And it will kind of be strife in that relationship. So we see right from the get-go of Genesis, we see God creating a good world. God creating a world in which we have fellowship with Him, we walk with Him, and we walk in good relationship with one another through sin that's broken.

And since then, we've been seeing the fallout ever since. Like the next kids, right, Cain and Abel, kill each other. Then throughout the Old Testament, we read about the great faith of the heroes of Genesis, but what we really see is they actually weren't that great to each other.

There was a lot of backbiting, a lot of struggle within the family. So we just see this breakdown of human relationships, this alienation between people. Whether or not you believe the Bible or not, I think we see this alienation well at play in our world today.

We see not in history, right? We've gained all this technology, we've gained all this knowledge, we've gained all this philosophy and wisdom. But do we really see more unity?

Do we really see more peace? Or do we see growing racial tension? Do we see greater divides between political parties? Do we see just an increased strife between genders?

[2 : 24] And not only do we see this, we see this and we don't like it, and we try to fix it, but we feel pretty helpless at trying to fix it, right? So we see all this stuff going on.

So maybe we join a peaceful protest, a peaceful demonstration, right? Only to read the next day in the paper that the side that we were peacefully demonstrating against felt fearful and marginalized by our demonstration.

Or maybe we elect a president from a minority culture with the hope that that's going to help seal the racial divide. And yet, have we seen that?

But more profoundly than simply being victims to this alienation, to this brokenness, to this broken relationships, we're actually participants, right?

So we say we're better than that. We say that these people just can't get along. If they would just consider one another as better than themselves, they would be good. And that sounds all good and great until we actually get in a situation where we feel pressed, where we feel pressure.

[3 : 26] And then we so quickly fall back on our preconceived notions, think about how we're better than the other person, and marginalize them. So we're in this world that is broken, alienated from God and from one another.

And part of this sense of alienation is not only that we see something's wrong, but that we also can't fix it or kind of helpless into it. So, two weeks ago in Ephesians, we read Ephesians 1, verse 19.

And this is part of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. And he says, he prays that the people will understand the immeasurable greatness of his power at work in us who believe.

And this is the power that raised Christ from the dead. So this is Paul's prayer. We see a little bit of this answered in the first half of Ephesians 2, right? We see this power at work in us is actually new life.

It brings us from death into life, brings us into spiritual life. And then we'll see in the second half, we'll see if this power at work in us through Christ actually answers this problem of alienation that we see so prevalent in our world.

[4 : 40] So if you'll turn with me to chapter 2, we'll start in verse 11. We'll read 11 and 12. So I'll give a little road map.

I mentioned this right before. So what we're going to talk about is we're going to talk about who we were, what Christ has done, how we did it, and who we are now. So that's where we're going. This first section, these first two verses, we're going to learn about who we were, right?

And so we see very clearly who we were. We were separated from Christ. We were separated from God's people. We were separated from God's promise.

And we were separated from hope in this world without God. So what Paul is specifically talking about is this relationship between Jew and Gentile. But we find ourselves kind of in this scenario, right?

Because Jews were people born into the nation of Israel. Gentiles were everybody else. So I think pretty much we all fall into this category. But specifically in this context, he's talking to the Ephesians, which were largely a group of Gentile believers or Gentiles.

[6 : 13] And so he's first highlighting this strife, this tension between Jews and Gentiles, right? They're the circumcision. They're the uncircumcision. This is kind of like a hedging against one another, right?

So one thing the Jews had received, right? They had received the promises of God. They had been given the covenant, right? And they had been given this special place to God. God calls them my special people. He had been faithful to them throughout their history.

And a sign of this was circumcision. What do the Jews do? They look down on everybody else who's not circumcised, right? And the Gentiles, having felt this despising, despised them back, right?

We're all that way, right? When we feel somebody despising us, our natural reaction is to despise back, right? And so Paul is kind of highlighting this tension. And farther more, what's even worse is he says that they're separated from God's people.

So not only is there this tension, but they're actually separated from God's people. So we see the promise that God gave to Abraham was that through Abraham's offspring, all the nations of the world might be blessed, right?

[7 : 21] So the Jews, not really living that out, right? When they look at the Gentiles as if they're lesser, as if they're not worthy to spend time with, they're not actually reaching out to the Gentiles to be this light, to be this blessing.

And so the Gentiles are sitting here, separated from God's people, separated from God, separated from God's promise. So the Jews were an expectant people. They had these promises all the way throughout their history that the Messiah is going to return.

He's going to restore all things. Gentiles didn't have that, right? And the Jews weren't actually good at communicating that to them. So by being separated from God's people, they're actually separated from these promises. They really had nothing to live for.

This is pretty explicit. It says no hope, having no hope. So that's pretty bold. But we recognize the truth of this statement, no hope.

And maybe we'll apply it to our culture today, right? So if we hope in anything that is not, one, secure, and two, ultimate, it's really not a hope at all.

[8 : 33] So let's think about politics, right? I kind of was on the Democratic side, now I'm going to be on the Republican side. I was fascinated. I was looking, why do people like Donald Trump, right? And one thing that came up is people had this hope that because Donald Trump has been successful in business, that he as a president will be a positive impact to our economy, right?

Oh, okay, so I'm going to vote for him. And that's going to be my hope because that's my finances, that does all these things. But what happens when your wife gets cancer? Or what happens when you lose your child?

What kind of hope is this economic success, right? So if your hope is, one, not secure, he might not actually be successful as a president. Should he win? Should he be voted for?

He might not actually bring good economy. So one, it's not secure. And two, it's not ultimate, right? So you're more rich, but your family's falling apart. You're more wealthy, but your relationships inside and outside of work have not increased.

And so we find both the Gentiles then, they were manufacturing things to be hopeful for because they had no promise from God, no promise from the creator, nothing that was secure and nothing that was ultimate.

[9 : 42] And we find ourselves, ourselves, our culture in that same position. We put our hope towards medical advances. We put our hope towards this next exciting vacation, right?

We put our hope towards a certain relationship that that's going to be fulfilling and satisfying. But these things aren't actually secure, and they're not actually guaranteed.

And so what Paul is really saying is, hey, what kind of real hope is that if it's not really guaranteed? So this is what they were. One, they were in tension with God's people, and they were actually without God and without hope.

They were without promise. So let's look to the next section. So just in transition, we talked about the tension and the alienation that we feel in this world and how we can't do anything about it.

And you know what? That's actually the point. That's the point that Paul is trying to get at here. You can't do anything about it. And Paul is leading to us. And the next statement starts with, But now in Christ.

[10 : 54] And so let's look at verses 13 through 17 and see if there actually is an answer to this tension that we feel. So starting in verse 13, But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once 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 the commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.

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

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

So what did Christ do? Right? What did he do? First thing, he made peace, and he created a new man in place of the two. And two, he killed the hostility, reconciling both men to God.

And so really what we're looking at, what the Ephesians felt, was this tension between man and man.

[12 : 09] They didn't like the fact that the Jews looked down on him. Made him feel like second-rate Christians. Made him feel like second-rate citizens. But what they actually get is reconciliation with God, right?

Through Christ. And so, and through that reconciliation, God actually says, Hey, I'm making one new man out of the two. Kind of a big concept. Let's look, let's see.

How did Christ do that? How did he do it? We see, firstly, that he broke down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law and the commandments expressed in ordinances.

So this idea, the law and commandments expressed in ordinances, is most of the commentators kind of talk about, Hey, this is referring to the ceremonial law versus the moral law, right?

So the ceremonial law was given to the Israelites so that they would recognize the holiness of God, right? Recognize that in order to approach God, we have to be holy.

[13 : 10] And realize that there are requirements to that end, right? But what the law was not was a means to righteousness.

We see this in Galatians 3. Paul talks about how the law was never intended to bring righteousness, but righteousness always came through promise. And he goes back and he looks at Abraham, right?

And the promise given to Abraham. And he says, I'll give you a human example. This is in Galatians 3. I'll give you a human example. Covenants, even in human terms, they're not changed, right?

Once they're ratified, they stay the same. And so he talks about how 430 years prior to the giving of the law, God made this promise to Abraham. And therefore, righteousness always came through promise.

But the Israelites had forgotten this. And they used their status before God as a means to look down on people, right?

[14 : 17] So they say we're special, we're a special people, and so we look down on the people who are not, right? And unfortunately, we find ourselves in that very same boat, right?

We have this tendency to look at the things that we're good at, to look at the things that we're strong at, and compare them with others, and to consider ourselves better than them, right?

So here's just a silly example. Not so silly. But my wife and I, one of us is extroverted, one of us is introverted. Myself being the more extroverted one, early in our relationship, I used to think that my wife didn't really love people that well, because she just didn't like being around them as much as I did.

And so I had this misconception, I had this pride, that said, I love people well, because I'm extroverted, and I like to spend time with them. What I learned is that my wife actually loves people, and she prays for people, and she thinks about people far more than I do in my personal time, right?

But what is my natural tendency? It's to take something that God has blessed me with, my personality, and to use that to pin against somebody else, and to make moral judgments on them, to make a barrier between them and myself, right?

[15 : 37] And because, so this is, I was listening to Tim Keller, and he was talking about this example. This is, the text is really talking about kind of the divide between Jews and Gentiles, right?

So he was talking about this wedding that he was officiating. There was one member of the wedding, was from kind of a Caucasian Anglo background, right?

The other was from another nationality that might have a little bit less emphasis on timeliness, right? And so he said, sure enough, the start of the wedding, there was one entire side there, and another entire side not there.

Fifteen minutes later, the rest of the family comes, and then thirty minutes later, the bride shows up, right? And so he says, what was interesting in the middle, and you had to listen, but you really didn't have to, is you heard the people who were there talking about, well, I guess they're just inconsiderate, they can't be on time, no wonder, they probably have trouble getting jobs, they probably this or that, right?

And they use their ideal of, hey, they've been blessed with efficiency, timeliness, whatever. The other group comes in, and what are they all about?

[16 : 58] Relationships. And they define an event by the event itself, not by the time frame for which the event is, right? And so they're like, these people are so uptight, they don't care about people, and all this kind of stuff.

And we see how naturally that happens between people, because we create these barriers based on external conformance to things that we think are right and moral. And this is what the Jews were doing, right?

They had been given this blessed law by which God gave them, for them to understand these great principles about who he is, and his holiness, and their relationship with him. And what they did is they used that to demean others, right?

To say, hey, you're not actually up to par, you're not up to snuff, right? And so let's see what Christ does, right? So I guess what you would think is, right, Christ comes in, and he corrects their misunderstanding.

No, Christ comes in, and he abolishes the law, right? He not only just corrects them, he abolishes it. And how does he do this? He does this by fulfilling all the requirements of the law, right? So part of the ceremonial law is sacrifices, you need to have sacrifices in order to be clean.

[18 : 03] It demonstrated to the Israelites that, hey, there is a penalty in paying for your sin. This alienation between you and God is real, and a payment is required for your sin, for your rebellion, right?

Christ was the perfect sacrifice. And in many other ways, Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law, and thereby abolished it. And so now we see Jew and Gentile not just happen to be recalibrated in what they think, that God, Christ abolished the barrier.

He broke down the wall of hostility so that they could be one person. They could be unified. So let's see what else Christ does, right? So the second part of this is we see that Christ not only reconciled man to man through abolishing the law, he also reconciled man to God, right?

So far, the Ephesians may not even be thinking about this, right? They're thinking about, hey, these Jews kind of despise him, you don't like it, right? And he comes in, and they actually, no, I've

actually made you right before God.

And how does he do this, right? So, part of the curse is that man sinned against God, and therefore could not be in his holy presence, right? And so they were alienated from God, and the fallout of this has been alienation from one another and brokenness ever since.

[19 : 20] So what does Christ do? He takes on our alienation. He takes on our separation that we deserve from God. This enmity, the Bible is pretty clear that if you don't follow God, you don't obey him, you are an enemy of God.

You are rebelling against him. You're an active rebellion against his rule, right? Right? But Christ, through his life, met the requirements of the law, and through his death, took on the alienation that we deserved so that we might be unified to God and unified to one another.

And this is his great message for the Ephesians. This is his great message for us. That not only have we been, this tension that we feel in life, not being able to get along with people, not being able to actually live in full relationships, has been satisfied because Christ broke down that barrier. But more importantly, Christ has broken down the barrier between us and God. And so, this is just kind of like, I don't know, it's good news.

This should give us a desire to praise God and praise him for what he's done. But it's kind of cool it doesn't even end there. So, let's continue. Let's look at verses 18 through 22.

[20 : 36] 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 with saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together in a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. So who are we? We are a new man, a man united to God and a man united to one another.

What does this union mainly look like? It looks like peace. The text says he came preaching peace to those who are far and peace to those who are near. What really is this peace?

It's access to God. Right? And so we are Gentiles, were Gentiles, who felt the tension between human relationships, frustrated over that, and what does God do through Christ?

He satisfies those but he gives us access to him. Right? Access to a relationship with him. And so this is one of the blessings we have and what Christ has done by reconciling us to God is he actually gives us access to the God of the universe, the creator, the restorer of all things.

[21 : 55] Right? And so we talked about hope earlier. That's pretty big hope. Right? The God who controls all things, we have access to him. We can speak to him.

He hears us. We have a close relationship. Let's look a little bit more about this close relationship. So we have this image, right? We have, so you then are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone 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. Right? So we are citizens in God's kingdom, right? But we are members of his household and we are actually his temple, the place where he dwells.

That's pretty heavy access, right? This is a pretty deep relationship he's calling us to. To sit in the joy of his kingdom, right? To enjoy the relationships as a family member of the God of the universe and to actually be the place where he dwells, right?

So this God through the Spirit dwells in his church. This is probably pretty shocking to a lot of the Jews at the time, right? Because in Ezekiel there's this vision of the Lord returning, God's presence returning, God's glory returning back to the temple.

[23 : 21] Here we start to see, hey, this temple might not be what you thought. It might not be a building like the Jews had, like they would worship, but it's actually a people of God. It's a people indwelt by God's presence and God's glory will shine through these people, right?

And so this is a pretty awesome thing, right? And so we recognize that through Christ he's given us access to God, brought us into his family, but also he's chosen to show his glory through us, right? And we'll see more of that in Ephesians. Ephesians 3 talks about how the manifold wisdom of God is displayed through the church, which is pretty cool, but we'll wait until we get there. But we see the beginning of that.

What this also means is we have unity with one another, right? As a new church, we've been brought into close proximity with one another. So the same, we can look at these images again and recognize, hey, we're part of the same kingdom, we're part of the same family, and we're part of the same dwelling place of God.

So what does this mean? How can we apply this? One, right, so one thing we recognize is human bonds are strong, right? And the stronger the force is that creates these bonds, the stronger the bond is, right?

[24 : 31] So we're, I think, mostly all Americans, right? So we have some kind of pride, we have culture, there's a lot of things that cause us to have a bond to one another because we grew up in kind of a similar environment, a similar country, a similar culture, so we have a natural bond, right?

But, unfortunately, I like my brother more than I like you guys, right? So I have this closer bond with my brother because he is from my intimate family, right? But what does God do?

In Ephesians 1, he talks about this great power that's at work in the church and this is the power that raised Christ to the dead, right? So this is a force that shapes a greater unity, a greater family and we can see that because this reunion with God, this reconciliation from God is a far greater thing than ties to a country or even ties to my earthly family, right?

And so what this is telling me is that the tie that I have between other Christians is more profound than any other relationship I have on this earth and so God is calling us to this.

He is calling us to be this place where God's glory dwells. So one thing that means is like if you want to know God and you want to see his power at work in your life, plunge yourself into the church.

[25 : 50] We talked about this a little while back and just a quick illustration. I went to a wedding this weekend, right? And I went to see a friend but it was a friend that I knew from here not from his back home.

So what was really cool was interacting with all his friends and his family from back home and I came to know my friend much better and I came to know his fiance much better. And so we recognize this dynamic, hey, it takes a community of people to know an individual.

And so I learned more about my friend Brandon because I hung out with Brandon's family and I hung out with his cousins and I hung out with his college friends, right? And if that's true of these human relationships that we have, is that not more true of God, right?

And so we, through, it says God is building his temple through us, through the spirit we are united. And so, would we not understand more of God when we delve ourselves into deep relationships with the people of God, right?

because Matt is going to see something different about God. God is going to work something special in Matt's life and he gives me the privilege of being in Matt's life and seeing how that comes to fruition, right?

[27 : 06] And so we recognize that through a multitude of people, we actually better understand and recognize God. So part of this call is, hey, you've been given this church, you've been given this great unity, plunge yourself into it, see God's power at work and get to know your God better through the many eyes, the many lights that he has given you to see him.

On the flip side, you say, hey, maybe I really just don't feel this great of a bond with the church. Maybe I don't feel that unified. Maybe I don't like Christians. Maybe I think some of them are weird. Maybe I don't really feel this connection.

But my encouragement to you, and I think the encouragement to the text, is to look at the cornerstone. We look at Christ. We look at the foundation of this.

And we know that the more to which we profoundly understand what he's done for us, what he's purchased for us, then we will find a greater connection with the people that he has put into our lives who have recognized that same great truth.

So maybe you don't feel that close to the church. A good step forward is to look at the cornerstone. So it's foundation. Christ is the foundation of this church, this temple.

[28 : 23] That means it's foundational. Christ should be what we think about before we act, before we say anything. Now we're fallen and that isn't true. But the more we understand that, the more we put Christ into our everyday situations and scenarios, the more we recognize how his gospel speaks to my anger, my frustration, how the gospel speaks to how I actually love my wife, the more I will come to recognize the great resource that I have in Christ, and the more I will come to love the other people who recognize that too.

In the end, it gives God glory, it gives Christ glory, it makes him look good, and it binds us together. So yeah, dive into the church. It's a great thing that God has given us to see his power, to know him better, and to more clearly display his glory.

So in conclusion, we've been all over the place, I'll come to a couple different points. first, praise the Lord, you were once separated, you didn't know God, you didn't know his promises, you were alienated from people.

He has brought you into the people of God, he has reconciled you between God and between others, so praise him for that. We want to get excited about the unity that he's purchased for us, but more importantly, we want to get excited about the Christ who purchased that unity for us, right? And so this is what it's all about. It's the fact that we have been given grace, and so praise the Lord for that grace. Reflect upon the grace that you've been shown to be given his promise as we brought it to his family.

[30 : 00] Seek to, so we talked about what we were, what Christ did, how Christ did it, and what we are now. So the, seek to live as what you are now, right?

We can do this by, one, putting our hope in God above everything else. Whenever we are tempted to put our trust in something that is material in this world, we are taking our hope away, basically, because there's really no hope in that.

So when we are tempted to put our hope in a new car, a new job, a new relationship, recognize, hey, those things aren't ultimate. You're only hindering your hope.

Live as though you are free to reach out to those who are different than you, right? God has broken down that barrier between you and people. Live in that freedom, and go out and engage with people who are different than you, who don't look like you, who may rub you the wrong way.

Plunge yourself into church. I already talked about that. And finally, look to the cornerstone. Keep your eyes set on Jesus. We don't enter the church through the cross and then move on.

[31 : 07] The cross is always the way in which we relate to Christ. And so this beautiful picture of the church being the building blocks, we being the building blocks built on the foundation of Christ, reminds us that, hey, at the core of everything we do is this reconciliation that we have from God.

And finally, let's, as a church, we've been blessed. Let's not sit on our blessing. Let's be willing to go out and share this with the world, right? And maybe an understanding that we were first, that people are first alienated from God and alienated from another, maybe that'll give us more patience when we deal with our non-Christian co-workers who frustrate us.

Maybe we recognize, hey, it's not so much about brokenness in our relationships, it's because there's a profound brokenness between this man, this woman, and God. And may we have compassion on them and may we reach out to them and share the blessing that we've received from Christ.

So with that, I'll pray. Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank you for all that you've given us in Christ. Lord, we look at the world around us and we get frustrated, we see that it's broken.

Lord, a lot of the world see this. But Lord, we thank you that you have given us freedom in Christ, Lord. You have reconciled us first to you and then to one another, Lord. You have broken down any barrier that we might have between other people.

[32 : 29] Because Lord, what is a temporal, an earthly barrier when we have been given the God of the universe to be our Father, to talk with, to commune with, to live with, to make our requests known, Lord.

We have you, we know that our standing before you is secure. Lord, through the blood of Christ. And so Lord, what barriers can we have in this earth? Lord, help us to live in this truth. Lord, help us to live in this freedom. Lord, I thank you for this church.

I thank you for the people that you put into my life. Lord, I thank you for the ways in which I see you more richly through their lives and through their walks with you. Lord, may you bless us as a church as we dive into your word and dive into life together that we may more beautifully display who you are and your glory to this world.

Lord, help us to recognize this power that raised Christ from the dead that's at work in us, the church. I thank you for your word and for this time together. In your name I pray. Amen. Amen. So the last song we're going to sing is called Cornerstone.

Kind of fits right in with what you're going to sing.