

We are United

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[0 : 00] As we consider our vision of life and ministry together over the next 10 years, we have been studying Ephesians to understand God's vision for the church! and getting to know who is the church that God wants us to become.

Finding out our characteristics of the bride that God is preparing for His Son, hoping that we will align our vision with God's vision for the church as we look forward to the time we honour God with how we live and do ministry at St. Paul's, united under Christ.

The church is God's new humanity, society and people, where old barriers are broken down. The church is what the world needs.

And we have seen in Ephesians so far that we are blessed to carry out God's plan to bless His world. We are growing in God's love and living hope to glorify God.

And we are alive, safe from making God's bride more beautiful. So today, we'll consider how we are united from the passage that Anne just read out for us from chapter 2, verse 11 to 22, with the following points.

[1 : 13] And you can follow that along in our church app. So, three points I want to talk about. A divided humanity, describing our condition outside of Christ, alienated, estranged and without hope.

A united church, proclaiming the great reconciliation work that Christ accomplished on the cross, making the two groups one. And being a united church, depicting our new identity and mission within this new community.

Fellow citizens and members of God's household, built together to become God's temple. So last Sunday, Steve, our senior minister, explained our predicament and condition as human apart from God.

We are dead because of our self-centeredness. Selfishness, a constant calculating of what is in it for me, is the root of sin and cause of problems we see in this world.

We live in a world riddled with division, opposition and alienation, where separation along racial, political, social and generational lines grow ever deeper.

[2 : 27] It's not much different to the time of Paul when he write this letter to the divisions. One of the more obvious separation was among believers when they start segregating and giving other people groups labels and names.

We read, Remember that at that time you were separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigner to the confidence of the promises, without hope, without God in the world.

Humanities segregated and call each other names due to selfishness. The computer within each one of us are constantly in overdrive, working out who are my in-group that will confirm my identity and worth.

Who are the group that I can step on to elevate myself, to achieve greater return for whatever effort I put into my life. So with five faces, Paul revealed a picture of profound darkness and despair of a divided humanity.

Firstly, he talks about separating from Christ. This is a fundamental alienation. Christ is a source of life, truth, and a way to our Heavenly Father.

[4 : 07] To be separated from Him is to be cut off from life's meaning, ultimate truth, and eternal destiny. This is a spiritual death that mentioned last week in previous passage.

Secondly, he used a face excluded from citizenship in Israel. Israel here referred to the nation God chose in history to bear His redemptive plan.

To be outside of this community means you were not part of the official narrative of God's salvation story. An outsider, a marginal figure.

Citizenship can only be by birth or granted. And John 1.12 says, Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believe in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

It's a privilege that cannot be earned or bought. It can only be received by faith in grace. We can often see how so many people turn their privilege as a weapon to exclude and ostracize those they label as foreigners or outsiders.

[5 : 14] Their action reflects the deep sense of loss and separation within themselves. The barrier and unrest they face when they try to reach out to their Father God.

In our faith that Paul uses foreigners to their confidence of the promise, God made confidence of promises to Abraham, the father of our faith, of redemption, rest, and ultimately a Savior.

These promises are to Abraham himself and his offsprings. And Galatians 3.7 says, tells us that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

This confidence, a vessel of hope of inheritance, but as a foreigner, humanity have no share in these certain future-oriented promises.

The future of humanity can only be the best described as a crop shrouded with uncertainty. And Paul goes on to say, without hope, without God, without the promises, all striving was ultimately fertile, because humanity is dead in our transgression.

[6 : 35] Despite its pantheon of gods, the Greco-Roman world was largely pessimistic or vague about the afterlife. They embarked on world concords to build great monuments to show their significance, but deep down is meaningless.

Meaningless. Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless, as said by the teacher of Ecclesiastic. The feeling of despair is what we can strongly resonate within our secular society today.

Our digital world has given us a parallel tour for connection, yet we are arguably a lonelier, more alienated society than ever.

We create perfect lives on social media, yet feel deeply inadequate compared to others. We might have hundreds of friends online, but no one to sit with us in our grief.

Anxiety, depression, and a search for meaning in achievement, likes, or substance manifest our state of hopelessness.

[7 : 48] And finally, without God in the world, the ultimate poverty. It doesn't mean polytheism or atheism per se, but it's more about not knowing the one true living God, the creator who is full of grace and truth, life is of death of an orphan wandering in the cosmos.

We live in a growing heat economy of transactional homelessness. The increasing number of ride-share driver, task app contractor, and delivery person, they're essential to cities' function, yet they have no stable place in it.

No company health insurance, no retirement plan, no team lunchroom. They're perpetual outsiders, navigating systems not built for them, always looking for a next kid.

To be without God in the world is to live in a state of spiritual kid world. We hustle for meaning. The next promotion, the perfect relationship, a fitness goal.

We contract for temporary relief, a vacation, entertainment, retail charity. But we have no permanent home, no secure inheritance, no loving father who provides and protects.

[9 : 13] As a stranger, negotiating with a universe that feels impersonal and transactional, our labor for purpose never leads to permanent rest.

This homelessness is a core human condition when we are apart from being brought into the household of God. So this fivefold description is a microscope of the shared human condition of life without Christ.

Racial superiority and prejudice, cultural arrogance and disdain, social stratification and opposition, political polarization and hospitality, and even division within churches over traditions, practice, or theological nuance are the external walls that divide humans.

We also build internal walls of pride, self-righteousness, judgment, bitterness, and unforgiveness. This wall isolates us from each other and from the life and love of God.

And Paul wants us to remember this former condition so we can see that what we need saving from is not only personal guilt, but also this corporate, structural reality of division and alienation.

[10 : 38] God's plan of salvation from the very beginning is to create a united new community. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the defining wall of hostility. By setting aside in flesh the law which is commands and regulations, his purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death our hostility. He comes and prays peace to you who are far away and peace to those who are near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one spirit.

But now, it's one of the most powerful transitional places in the scripture. All the former darkness is utterly rewritten by the work of Christ.

Paul here unfilled the most central revolutionary social truth of the Christian faith, that Christ himself is our peace.

[12:01] Peace is not an abstract feeling or temporary truth. It is a person, Jesus Christ. He achieved unity through the cross.

The basis of the unity is the blood of Christ. The cost of being brought near was astronomically high, achieved not through compromise or moral persuasion, but by the blood of Christ.

By giving his life on the cross, Christ paid the ultimate price, satisfying the demand of justice, appeasing God's wrath and providing the basis for forgiving the debt we owe each other.

This is the foundation of reconciliation. The method of unity is destroying the defining war. The law with its commands and regulations are the instrument and sign to tell us how short we have fallen from God's standard.

It's a symbol of our separation from God and his people. That war which defied was abolished by Christ in his flesh. How did he do this in his flesh?

[13:16] by fulfilling the law perfectly. And then on the cross, he bears his curse for law breakers. Thus, the law's function as a condemning and dividing force was set aside for those who trust in Christ.

No longer a barrier between people and God and people with peoples. the purpose of unity is to create one new humanity.

God's purpose was not simply for believers to conform to certain rules and regulations, but to transform in a new humanity that he is creating for himself.

This is a new creation, a brand new category of humanity. In this new community, being in Christ is a new primary identity.

Racial, cultural, and social differences remain, but they lost that defining and dividing power.

Instead, they become a diverse canvas upon which the rich grace of God is displayed.

[14:32] And the dual dimension of unity are peace with God and peace with each other. Christ's work brings reconciliation in both the vertical and horizontal dimension.

Vertically, reconcile both of them to God through the cross. We are enemies of God because of our sin. The cross appeased their hostility, restoring our relationship with God.

Horizontally, the same cross put to death the hostility between humans. When we stand together at the foot of the cross, seeing ourselves equally as sinners saved by grace alone through faith alone, any sense of superiority based on law, lineage, or cultural lost its footing.

Ultimately, through Him, we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. What a glorious truth. The Church is not a club of morally improved individuals, but a new creation community, purchased by Christ's blood from the death, resurrected by His power from death, and united by His Spirit.

Our peace is found on Christ's finished work, not on our achieved consensus. So how do we live our being at the United Church?

[16:03] Let's read on. It says, Consequently, you are no longer foreigner and stranger, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of His household. Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone, in Him, the whole building is joined together and raised to become a holy temple in the Lord.

And in Him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. Since we have been made one in Christ, how then shall we live out this identity?

Paul uses three powerful metaphors to describe our present status and ongoing process of growth. So firstly, we are citizens and family members.

No longer foreigners or strangers, we now possess the ultimate belonging and identity. We are fellow citizens sharing equal rights, responsibility and protection.

We are even more significantly members of His household, children in God's family, brothers and sisters to one another. This means church relationship surpasses ordinary club friendship.

[17 : 23] It's a family love relationship bought by the blood of Christ. Our responsibility to one another is the loyalty, acceptance and support all to family.

And secondly, we are a temple under construction. This is a dynamic, growing metaphor. The church is a building with apostles and prophets as foundation.

Apostles and prophets are common terms referring to the Bible, which witness to and proclaim the truth about Christ. Our foundation will become stronger as we connect with God daily in reading the Bible and prayer.

as we, as well as intentionally sharing the gospel, which are two of the seven rhythms of grace that is listed in the book of our season magazine.

The chief cornerstone of the church is Christ Jesus Himself. The cornerstone determines the alignment and angle and stability of the whole structure.

[18 : 31] Christ is our standard, our center and our reliance. True unity happens when every part is aligned to Him as we practice the seven rhythms of grace.

The building process is described as in Him the whole building is joined together and raised to become a holy temple in the Lord. As we worship God and build spiritual friendship weekly, which are another two rhythms of the grace that we have mentioned, each believer is like a living stone as referred to 1 Peter 2, verse 5, being built together by the Spirit.

The process requires joining together, fitted and connected precisely, and rises gradually, requires time, patience, and growth. Unity is not a state of perfection achieved overnight.

It's a process of continuing being built together in Christ, which sometimes involves sanding and trimming and all those things. And thirdly, we are God's drawing place.

This is the ultimate purpose of the church existence, to be God's drawing. In Old Testament, temple was a place where God's glory temporarily resides.

[19 : 56] Now, through His living Spirit, God takes up permanent residence in His new temple, the united community of church. God desires to manifest His presence and glory in the midst of our loving church life together.

When we make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit, we display to the world the reality of God with us. We are united as we look forward to our life and ministry for next five to ten years.

We must let unity be called to our community's DNA, bearing in mind the picture of the gathering of multitude in Revelation 7, verse 9.

A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne, before the Lamb. We hope to display Christ's unity in our diversity, unity.

To live in unity, each of us must constantly return to the foot of the cross. When I feel impatient, judgmental, or distant from other member, I need to remember, Christ died for them as he died for me.

[21 : 15] I, like them, am a sinner saved by grace. The cross stripped me of any right to look down on anyone, and give me the motive to forgive and reconcile.

St. Paul is a church comprised of people from different cultural backgrounds, social strata, and age groups. So let's not try to erase those differences, but lean to appreciate them in Christ.

See how they enrich the weakness of Christ's body. Our unity is not in uniformity, but in diversity, testifying to the supernatural power of Christ that bring us together.

So every time we choose fellowship over isolation, forgiveness over bitterness, or humble collaboration over selfish ambition, we are not just being nice, we are practicing for eternity.

In a divided world, a genuinely loving, united Christian community, is itself a powerful gospel proclamation. It proves to the world that Jesus is real and that his spirit has a power to change hearts and dissolve hostilities.

[22 : 34] Our attractiveness to the community will depend significantly on the genuine, supernatural, and able love we have for one another across natural barriers.

So let let our unity be our witness to the world. Let's look again to Christ who is our peace. The wars in our society in our own hearts are strong.

It seems permanent, but the resurrection of Christ declared that war is final. The mightiest war ever built, the war of death itself, is strutted on Easter morning.

Every other dividing war of hostility is by comparison a temporary fence. We can rely on the Christ who has already made peace and submitted to the guidance of his whole dream drawing spirit, allowing him to build us.

This once scattered hostile stone into a dwelling fit for his glory. So let's live in light of our destiny. Let the vision of that grace unite the multitude through our prayers, soften our hearts, and guide our action.

[23 : 52] Let's be a people so captivated by the beauty and glory of God that we cannot help but to live it out in the present. In the coming weeks, as we study the rest of Ephesians, Paul will show us how to live our life that is grace filled.

And cross shaped. A life of a true disciple of Jesus, a true Christian. Paul will show us in the rest of this letter how to fulfill the good works which God prepared in France for us to do in our marriage, our family, our workplace, and our day-to-day life.

Our aim at St. Paul's is not just to build a cohesive church for the next ten years, but a united church, joining God in the construction of his eternal dwelling place.

He is preparing for his one and only Son. We are by grace becoming here, now, and what we will be forever. One redeemed people from every division, united by one Savior, to the glory of one God.