

Joined Together in Christ - Ephesians

2:11-22

Introduction

- Over the past few weeks we've been working through a short series focusing on the church, and the premise of this series has been taking some time to consider why church matters. But in doing that, there's a question that we haven't asked quite yet, which will change the way that we think about this conversation.
- What actually is the church?
- If we're going to spend time talking about why church is important, then it's important to take a bit of time to consider what actually makes us who we are as a church.
- For Liberty Grace, we've been here in this building since November, it's a little different from your stereotypical "church building", but it's been a huge blessing to be here. It was really cool when we first moved in here to see how each week, slowly this space started to feel more and more like it was ours.
- There's a sense of security, and even a bit of identity that comes for a church in having a building, and I know we've felt that after an extended period of not having a building or meeting space to really call our own.
- Being here is a huge blessing, but is this what makes us a church? Having the building, and the nice tech, and instruments?
- If not, then what actually is "the church"?
- The passage that we're looking at today, Ephesians 2:11-22 is going to show us more of a picture of what the church really is, and what it means to be a part of it.

Before the Gospel we were far off, and alienated

- To begin, I just want to give a bit of background on the book of Ephesians in general. This is a letter that Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, and he seems to be primarily talking to Gentile, or non-Jewish Christians throughout the book.
- One of the themes that Paul emphasizes strongly throughout his letter is to describe the life of Christians before they came to know Christ, contrasted with the new life that they have in the Gospel. As he's talking to these gentile believers, he takes time to point out that "At one time your life was like this.... But now, it's like this....." . And you see that kind of thing a number of times throughout the book. The old life, vs. the new life.

- Our passage today is no exception, it begins with a remembrance of how things used to be for the Gentiles, and the picture that we have here, is not necessarily a positive one.

“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” - Eph. 2:11-12 (ESV)

- So he starts out with talking about the state of the Gentiles “*At one time*”, which is meant to be a time before they came to know Christ, which we’ll go into a bit more in a few minutes. But the picture that Paul paints here of how the Gentiles lived before Christ could be summed up by the words “*separation*” and “*alienation*”. We see both of those words in these first two verses, and later on in the passage, Paul describes those who are in this state of separation as those who are far off.
- And as he sets up his discussion in this passage, Paul describes for us two different levels of separation and alienation that were experienced by the Gentiles before they came to know Christ.
- The first level of separation/alienation that Paul talks about, is the separation/alienation from God himself.
- He says at the beginning of V. 12 “*You were at that time separated from Christ*”.
- And that separation that Paul is talking about goes back to V. 1 of Ch. 2, where he says:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins” - Eph. 2:1 (ESV)

- So when Paul talks about “*at that time...*”, the time that he’s referring to is the time in which the people were dead in trespasses and sin. That sin is the very thing that causes us to be separated from Christ.
- So that’s the first level, and the second level of separation that Paul mentions is the separation that existed between people, specifically between the Jews, and the Gentiles.
- In V. 11 he points out that the Gentiles would be called “*the uncircumcision*” by the Jews. Circumcision was a sign for the Jews of the covenant that God had made with Abraham, that the Israelites would be his chosen people.
- So when the Jews would refer to the Gentiles as “*the uncircumcision*” basically as a way of saying to them “*You’re not a part of this*”.
- And Paul emphasizes this saying that they were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise. Because the Gentiles were separated and alienated from God, it meant they were also alienated from God’s people, unable to have any kind of relationship or involvement with them, and there was actually a lot of hostility between the two

groups of people. There was a huge cultural separation that seemed pretty impossible to overcome.

- That's not to say that no Gentile was ever able to have any kind of involvement with the people of Israel, the Old Testament gives us examples of Gentiles who were gentiles, yet were welcomed by the Israelites.
- But as a general rule, the Jews and the Gentiles were two incredibly separate groups, that did not get along with one another at all, and did not really mix. And this would have been especially true at the time that Paul was writing this letter.
- So those that Paul was writing to had to deal with the reality of both levels of separation, separation from God himself, as well as separation from God's people. They were completely on the outside.
- And at the end of V. 12 we see the implications of this separation. Paul tells the church that in the time that they were living with this separation and alienation that they had "*no hope and [were] without God in the world*".
- To be separated and alienated from God and his people left them in a state of complete hopelessness and need.
- And it's a need that each and every one of us shares. At one point or another, every single one of us was in the same state of separation and alienation from God, and by extension, God's people, because of our sin.
- And maybe for some of you here today, you hear these words and they hit pretty close to home. You understand Paul's description of separation on a very personal level, because it's the place that you're in right now.
- You feel that separation from God, and maybe even sitting here in the church, you feel like there's just something that you're missing.
- And if that's you today, I want to encourage you that even though it starts out a bit heavy, there's so much hope here, because Paul refers to this hopeless state in the past tense, "*At one time you were like this*". This life of hopelessness without God is not the end of the story.

The Power of the Gospel Reconciles us to a Holy God

- As we move on, we want to take some time to look at how we can find hope of redemption from that state of hopelessness and separation.
- To start, this entire passage begins with the word "*Therefore*", causing us to take a bit of a closer look at everything that came before.
- V. 1-10 is such a beautiful and clear explanation of the Gospel, starting with the reality of sin, and explaining how Christ has saved us. V. 8-9 are incredibly famous verses:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” - Eph. 2:8-9 (ESV)

- So the chapter begins with the Gospel, then that reality is the very thing that leads us into this conversation of old life .vs. new life.
- Finding hope in the midst of the situation that V. 11-12 presents is all wrapped up in the truth and the power of the Gospel.
- So, because of the reality of the Gospel that has just been shared in the first ten verses, Paul calls the Gentiles to remember the state that they once were trapped in, so that they can better appreciate the new life that they have in Christ.
- It’s important though, to start with V. 11-12, because taking some time to understand our own problem and need makes what comes next so much greater.
- V. 13 begins with these all important words *“But now”*.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” - Eph. 2:13 (ESV)

- *“But now in Christ”*. Previously, we experienced a life of alienation in which we were separated from Christ, but the new life that Paul is going to describe, is a new life *“in Christ”*. The life that we’re about to read about is one that is only made possible through the power of the Gospel. Only the Gospel could ever provide a solution to the problem of separation.
- And the first way that the Gospel provides a solution to our problem is that the power of the Gospel reconciles us to a Holy God.
- In Christ those who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
- Isn’t that amazing? Because of the blood of Christ, all those of us who were far off from God, separated and alienated because of our sin, can be brought near to him. That’s such a powerful image.
- And you can see through all of this, that Paul makes clear that the issue of sin and separation from God, and need for Christ, is not something that is specific to just one group of people, or one specific culture. The Gentiles were not the only ones that needed to hear the Gospel.
- Look at what he says in V. 17:

“And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.” - Eph. 2:17 (ESV)

- Both for Jews and Gentiles alike, for those who were far off, and those who were near, this need for Christ was universal.

- This idea continues into V. 18, where Paul says:

“For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.” - Eph. 2:18 (ESV)

- We have all been granted a kind of access to God that had never been possible before. On Good Friday we looked at how, in the moment Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, signifying that the separation between God and his people no longer existed. Now because of the blood of Christ that was shed on the cross, when we trust in him we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and access to the Father.
- And this new access that was made available through the Gospel was for both Jews, and Gentiles alike. Through Christ, both had been given an access to God that was never possible before for either of them. Separation from God is not just an issue for one group of people, it’s an issue for all of humanity, and so the Gospel is a message of hope and reconciliation for all mankind.
- And know that if you’re in that place of feeling that separation from God because of your sin, this access and redemption is available to you through the Gospel. All that Christ asks of us is to recognize our sin, and our need for a saviour, and turn to him in repentance and faith to receive salvation, to be brought near to a loving and Holy God. Think of V. 8:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” - Eph. 2:8 (ESV)

- This gift, and this new access to the Father through the Spirit is a gift that is available to all who turn to Jesus Christ in repentance in faith. If you’ve never done that, I want to encourage you to really consider Paul’s words here in this passage, that Christ came to preach a message of peace to those who were near, and those who were far off so that through his sacrifice on the cross, we could have access to the Father through him.
- The Power of the Gospel reconciles us to a Holy God.

The Power of the Gospel Welcomes us into the Household of God

- So we see in that, that Christ redeems us from the first level of separation and alienation that Paul described in V. 11-12.
- but there’s another relationship that we have to consider. The separation that the Gentiles experienced from God also meant that they were separated and alienated from God’s people, so as we consider the way that the Gospel brings us into relationship with God, we also have to consider how that impacts our relationship with God’s people.

- Just as Paul describes how the Power of the Gospel reconciles us to a Holy God, he also describes how the Power of the Gospel Welcomes us into the household of God. Look at what he says in V. 14-16.

“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 might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” - Eph. 2:14-16 (ESV)

- He has torn down that dividing wall of hostility. What Paul is referring to there is that within the temple in Jerusalem, there would have been a number of separated courtyards. The very inner part of the temple was the holy of holies, which was a space that only the high priest could enter once per year, then there was a courtyard that was meant for the Jews to come and worship God, then there was an even further outer courtyard meant for the Gentiles, and they were not allowed to cross that barrier to go any deeper into the temple. There was a literal dividing wall that existed between the two, that could never be crossed.
- One of the reasons that Paul was arrested, and later put to death was that there was a rumour being spread that he had brought a gentile into one of the inner parts of the temple.
- But now Paul says that Christ has broken down that dividing wall, and reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God in one body, killing the hostility that had previously existed between them.
- Both Jews and Gentiles were able to find peace, not only with God, but also with one another because of their new life in Christ.
- Where there once was such division and separation, fellowship could now take place through the power of Christ. Christ tore down the boundaries between these two groups of people, allowing them to be unified together on the basis of his sacrifice, and the salvation that he provided through his death and resurrection, which was needed by both of them.
- Where once you had separated groups of people with nothing but hostility for one another, Christ created a brand new community of people, all unified in him, and in the Gospel
- And when you come to faith in Christ, you are not only reconciled to God, you are welcomed into that community, unified with all those who have trusted in him.
- And this new community that we are invited into has a purpose to it. It’s not just being invited to be part of an exclusive social club. V. 19-21 gives us a glimpse of what the purpose of this new community is, and again, it’s all wrapped up in the Gospel.

“So then you 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.” - Eph. 2:19-21 (ESV)

- Again, the power of the Gospel deals with the issue of separation. Paul tells the Gentiles that he’s writing to remind them that in Christ, they are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God.
- The community that we are called to be a part of through the Gospel is the household of God, and a holy temple in the Lord. The purpose of this community is worship.
- We are called to worship and proclaim the goodness of the God who has saved us.
- And just to emphasize the significance that Christ has to this relationship, he is described as the “*cornerstone*” of this new building and community that is established through his death and resurrection. He is the essential foundation, and without him, the entire thing falls apart.
- For those of us who are followers of Christ, we are called to be joined together, and to grow together, into a community whose purpose and mission is to worship our great God, and spread the good news of our saviour.
- Not only does the power of the Gospel reconcile us to a Holy God, it welcomes us into the household of God, breaking down hostility, and inviting all those who have trusted in Christ to be unified together on the basis of the Gospel, to grow into a holy temple in the Lord.
- And I want to be clear, even if you haven’t trusted in Christ, you are welcome here at Liberty Grace. The goal of this passage is not to make you feel like if you haven’t trusted in Christ then you’re not wanted here.
- In fact, the absolute opposite is true. If you haven’t trusted in Christ, this is exactly where you should be, and we are thrilled that you are here.
- But what this passage is saying, is that that deep sense of community that exists within the church is entirely based on the unity that we have with one another through the Gospel, and that it is only after we’ve understood the Gospel, turned to Jesus in repentance and faith, and been reconciled to our Holy God, that we’re welcomed into the household of God, able to experience that deep sense of unity with all those who have trusted in Christ.

Conclusion

- So our previous situation: We lived in a state of separation and alienation, with “*no hope and without God in the World*”.
- But because of what Christ has done on the cross, **the power of the Gospel reconciles us to a Holy God and invites us into the household of God.**
- And now as a result, we are “*being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit*”.

- We have been welcomed, and built into this amazing community of the church through the work of Christ, who is our cornerstone, the very foundation of everything that we are as a church.
- So as we consider what the church is, it is so much more than just a building.
- The church is a group of people who have been transformed by the power of the Gospel, brought into reconciliation with our Holy God, and invited into an amazing community which is the household of God.
- I love the building that we have here. It's an amazing gift that God has given us, which has opened up a lot of opportunities to care for one another and reach our community, but this building is not what makes us Liberty Grace Church.
- Thinking back to the time that we were meeting in the yoga studio, with no building of our own, having to carry all of our stuff in each week, we were no less Liberty Grace Church than we are right now.
- Even during the time we couldn't meet in person at all and had to have our services on zoom, we were still just as much the church as we are right now.
- Again, that's not to say that having a building is a huge blessing and asset to us as a church, but it's never been the thing that makes us who we are.
- The church is not defined by where we meet, or the resources that we have. The church is defined by the power of the Gospel, and the way that God has been at work in our lives as a people.
- We are a community. And not just a community for the sake of being a community, but a community that is built together by the power of the Gospel and the blood of Christ.
- Each week, as we meet together, it's a celebration of what Christ has made possible through his blood. For all those who are far off from God, Christ's blood makes it possible for you to be drawn near to God and be a part of this amazing community.
- So if you've trusted in Christ, then when you come to this place, and meet with fellow believers in Christ, it doesn't matter what other differences may exist between us, we are unified, joined together in the power of Christ with one another, with that goal of being a temple together, and a dwelling place for our great God, who we've been given access to by the sacrifice of his Son. Isn't that cool? In a room where you may have nothing else in common with anyone around you, you can know that you are joined together with all those here who have trusted in Christ on the basis of his loving sacrifice for you.
- You have been saved out of a life of separation and alienation into a life of peace and relationship with God and one another.
- **The power of the Gospel reconciles us to a Holy God and invites us into the household of God.**

- That's what makes us who we are as a church.