

CHRISTIAN UNITY IN A FRACTURED WORLD
Ephesians 2:11-22
6.28.2020

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, everyone! It's great to 'see' you together this morning – even if my vision is impeded a bit by automotive glass. You know, the last time we did this, it was really impactful for me to see so many Trinity folks in our parking lot. After weeks of coming to an empty church on Sundays, it was great to see so many of you drive in and be together again.

And I know we aren't back to normal services just yet, but even the limited capacity worship services are still a vast improvement to where we were just a few weeks ago. However, despite this improvement, nothing can replace the physical gathering of the entire local church. And that's why we're here this morning. That's why we wait to take communion until we can *all* be physically present together. Our togetherness matters. It matters because it serves as an imperfect, but beautiful picture of what God has done and is doing as He makes for himself a new people, united in Christ and built up by the Spirit.

And it's this glorious truth that I want to spend a few minutes unpacking for us this morning. Not only is Christian central to the ordinance of communion, it is also our greatest witness in an increasingly fractured world. You see, we live in a society today that is constantly dividing people up into certain identity groups. "You're a white male, so you're part of this group." "Oh, you're a black female, you're part of that group." "You're a transgender hispanic lesbian, you are part of this *other* group." "You have this profession, you can't be part of that group, you're now in this other one."

Individuals are no longer evaluated on the basis of their beliefs, character, or ideas, but almost exclusively on the basis of what group or groups they belong to. This may seem like something brand new, but evaluating people along ethnic, gender, and other non-essential lines has been around a very long time. It's not an American problem; it's a human problem. And it's one whose only remedy is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This morning it is my prayer that you'll see the glory of this remedy in Ephesians 2:11-22. I've broken this passage down into three parts that highlight the human condition and its remedy: (1) Divided by sin, (2) United in Christ, and (3) Built up by the Spirit

1. Divided by sin [Read vv. 11-12]

Paul is exhorting the Gentile Christians in Ephesus to remember something critical: that they were once hopeless, separated from God and His covenant promises. Why? Because they weren't Jews; they weren't physical descendants of Israel. In the OT, covenant blessing passed down primarily (though not exclusively) through Israel's physical lineage.

Now at this point you may be asking, "Wait, if this is true, isn't God guilty of evaluating Israel and their forefathers on the basis of their ethnicity? Isn't that a problem?"

No, God did not evaluate Israel's forefathers on the basis of their ethnicity. He chose them on the basis of His absolute freedom and purpose. God did not factor in Abram's

ethnicity when the LORD called him out of Ur and issued his covenant promise to Abram and his descendents. He chose Abram because He chose him.

God is not guilty of prejudice, but neither is he guilty of playing favorites. Every family of the earth, Abram's included, ought to have been numbered among the hopeless, alienated, and separated. God owes nothing to anyone. It's only by His groundless gracious and merciful choice that *anyone* is shown favor at all! And that's exactly the point Paul is making in these first two chapters of Ephesians, verses 11-12 of chapter 2 setting the context for the Gentile inclusion specifically.

We are divided by sin. Sin separates us from God and one another. This is true of Jews as well, by the way. Israel may have been privileged through God's covenants of promise in the OT and as the people from whom Christ came, but Paul is very clear that apart from Jesus, every ethnic Jew is equally separated from God and His promises.

2. United in Christ [Read vv. 13-20]

There is no separation so vast, no division so severe, no obstacle so great, no hostility so volatile that cannot be bridged, mended, overcome, or placated by the cross of Jesus Christ. Nothing stands in the way of God's unifying power in Christ!

There may be many ethnicities in Adam, but there is only one, new humanity in Christ. There may be many nations in Adam, but there is only one people of Christ. There may be many households in Adam, but there is only one household with Christ – who himself is its chief cornerstone.

But notice this: when God unites us together in His son, we lose our old identities (v. 15). A similar idea is captured in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ."

This does not mean we cease being men and women or lose our ethnic distinctiveness. What it does mean is that such characteristics are secondary and non-essential to our most important identity in Christ. As such, we are not to evaluate others (Christians specifically) on the basis of these secondary characteristics.

There are no white Christians. There are no black Christians. There are only Christians. There are no identity qualifiers for "Christian". Yes, some happen to have more melanin in their skin than others. And yes, different people come from different backgrounds and have different experiences. But the merit of the individual, their contributions, or their character should never be judged on the basis of these secondary characteristics.

One is not guilty of some wrong because one is white or black, a man or a woman. Nor is one prevented from being guilty of some wrong because one is white or black, a man or a woman. This may be how the world does it, but that cannot be how the church does it.

One is guilty of a wrong because one has committed wrongdoing, either by commission or omission. One is not guilty merely by association. Christians are to evaluate people as individuals because that is how God evaluates each one of us.

Apart from Christ, we may have been many things, but in Christ we are one thing: a Christian. And we are brought into a new family with one Father, one Spirit, and one Lord, Jesus Christ.

We are united in Christ.

3. Built up by the Spirit [Read vv. 21-22]

Like our salvation, our unity in Christ is both a present and future reality.

Like a house or physical structure of that time, the Church has its foundation (the apostolic testimony) and cornerstone (Christ). But according to these verses, it's not quite a finished project. Paul writes that the Church is "being joined together", and not that 'has been joined'. Consequently, this spiritual structure "grows". It's not a static object, it's dynamic. It's becoming something. What exactly? "A holy temple to the LORD...into a dwelling place for God."

In case you weren't aware, none of us are perfect. No individual Christian is done being sanctified. No church has completed the sanctification process either. We are all a work in progress, and so is the Church (universal and local).

Consequently, there have been and still are many ways we fall short of living as a united people of God. Chattel slavery, apartheid, Jim Crow are all historical examples when many Christian individuals and churches, despite being in positions of influence, failed to live out the Christian mandate of love and unity. Fortunately, these evil institutions no longer exist because many other Christians rose to the occasion and championed the cause of biblical justice.

Today we look around and see a fractured and divided world. Ironically, those who promote this new division, campaign under the banners of "equality" and "inclusion". And unfortunately, this ideology is infiltrating the Church. I say this, not to discourage you, but to draw your awareness to it so that we can stand for biblical justice together. We're not done being built up. We're all works in progress.

But take heart, the One ultimately responsible for the building up of the church is not you or me, but the Spirit of God! "In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God **by the Spirit**" (v. 22).

We are built up by the Spirit.

COMMUNION

There may be many uncertainties in our fractured world, but the union in Christ as a body of believers is a done deal. And while there may be ways in which our unity is not yet as we ought to be, we can be sure of this: *that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ* (Phil. 1:6).

And this is what communion is all about. It's about proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26), the death that has brought us near, broken down the dividing wall, abolished the Old Covenant ordinances, reconciled us to God and each other, killed the

hostility, given us access to the Father, and made us fellow citizens and co-heirs with Christ!

Let us now proclaim his glorious, unifying death together as one people.