

Pastor Kyle Mercer
We Are United

May 14, 2023

Series: The Church and the Home
Ephesians 2:11-22

BIG IDEA – SIN SEPARATES...BUT JESUS BRINGS TOGETHER

We're about one thing here. We're about making and mobilizing disciples. If you're here, I want you to know that. If you're new, I want you to know that. Everything we do, whether it's this environment you're in right now, or maybe we'll talk later about our Community Groups, or maybe you dropped your kids off in our kids' ministry... I want you to know that we view every environment as a vehicle to help us make and mobilize disciples. In fact, we're always asking that question.

We're asking, "Are Community Groups making more and better disciples? Is kids' ministry making more and better disciples?" If you could come to me and show me without a doubt, "Pastor Kyle, I want to show you that our Community Groups are not making or mobilizing disciples," then we would get rid of them. We'd have to do something else because Community Groups aren't the goal; it's to make and mobilize disciples.

But not just make and mobilize disciples. We want to do that in a certain environment or a certain atmosphere. Here's how we say it here: "We want to make and mobilize disciples in an environment of prayer and worship." That's how we want it to feel. And not just here. I mean that in your home. When you put your kids to bed at night, I want there to be an environment of prayer and worship.

Now, how do we want to instill that? Part of it is our Nights of Prayer and Worship. Tomorrow night, I want you to come back, because we did one of these in March, and it was so significant and so special. Dare I say... I've been here the whole time, all seven years of this church, and one of the most significant nights was back in March. In fact, we added *this* one. This is a flywheel and a fireplace of prayer and worship.

Here's what we're going to be doing. Donovan and his team are going to be up here leading us in some of our favorite songs, and then we're going to be uniquely... Every prayer night is going to be different. We're going to do a couple of these this year. This time, we're going to be praying for unique ages and stages in our church.

So, we're going to pray for single moms. We're going to pray for young couples. We're going to pray for kids. We're going to pray for middle schoolers. We're going to pray for college students. We're going to pray for empty nesters and anybody else I forgot. So I want you to come out.

By the way, as I talk about ages and stages and groups of people in the church who we love...happy Mother's Day to everybody. If you're just finding out it's Mother's Day, you're in trouble. I'm sorry. You're in big trouble. We love mom. I love my mom. I love the mom to my three kids. Abe Lincoln said, "No man is poor who has a godly mother."

Here's what we know: Jesus Christ is the head of the church, but Mom is the heart of the church. When we talk about prayer, who has led the church in prayer for the last 2,000 years? Mom. So, we just want to say, "Happy Mother's Day" to all of the moms. But here's what else we know, and you know this. I know this as a person, and I know this as a pastor. For many people, Mother's Day is super joyful. For other people it's very hard.

Sometimes it's hard for single women as they're getting older and they want to be a mom, but to be a mom they want to get married, and they're not married, so they can't be a mom. They're reminded on Mother's Day how far they are from being a mom. There are other people who are married and want to be a mom, but they can't get pregnant. They can't stay pregnant.

For other people, Mother's Day is a reminder that Mom is not here. It's the first Mother's Day without Mom or one of the first without Mom. For some, sadly, they've lost a child, and Mother's Day is a reminder of who's not here. If that's you, here's what we want to say. This is what the Bible teaches: *where the ideal is lacking, grace is abounding*. We don't want you to view your future apart from the grace of God. So, we're going to pray for moms and those who want to be a mom, and then we're going to dive into Ephesians 2. Let's pray together.

Lord, we are so grateful. I'm grateful for my mom. I'm grateful for Margy who's the mom to our three kids. Lord, we are so grateful for the way Mom takes a house and makes it a home. We're thankful for the deep investment Mom makes in each of us, especially when we're so young. I want to pray for, particularly, all of the women in this room right now who are grieving internally.

I've talked to women before who don't like to come to church on Mother's Day because it's a reminder of something that's missing or lacking in their life. So, we pray for women who desire to be married, Lord, that you would lead them in that direction. We pray for women who desire to be moms, that you would give them the desire of their hearts. It's such a good desire to want to be a mom and to want to raise godly kids, Lord.

For any of those today who are grieving because it's Mother's Day and they don't have their mom here or they don't have their son or daughter here, we pray a special grace on them, Lord, that all of us would not look to the future apart from the grace of God. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

We all know what it's like to feel excluded or not invited. This may sound silly to you, but to me, still... When I talk about it, it still bothers me a little bit. I didn't make the seventh-grade basketball team. I can still see seventh grade me going home. I'm embarrassed to tell you this because I was in middle school, but I went home and cried, and I played pool by myself.

I remember my dad came down to talk to me, and I just remember feeling like, "Oh, no! I have to go tomorrow and face all of my friends who made the team, and I have to be the person who wasn't good enough to make the seventh-grade basketball team." We all experience this.

The first time you probably experience it is when you're not invited to a kid's birthday party. Anyone remember that? You're like, "Why wasn't I invited?" and your mom has to sit you down and go, "Well, Timmy could only bring 10 people to Chuck E. Cheese. It's expensive."

Now, some of us... We get older, and all of a sudden we're not invited to be a part of the wedding party or, if you're a guy, you're asked to be an usher and not a groomsman. It's like, "Hey, you're not one of my five good friends. You're right after that." For others, we can't get into a certain college, and that's a wake-up call. Or we don't get the job we interviewed for. We all know what it's like to be excluded.

Well, Paul is going to talk about that today. If you'll type to or turn to Ephesians 2, we'll be in verses 11-22. This is the part of Ephesians no one talks about. When I say, "Ephesians 2," you're like, "I love that passage," and what you mean is you love the first 10 verses. You love the "Saved by grace." You love the "You're God's *poiema*, his workmanship." We talked about that last week.

Here's what Paul is going to tell us in this passage. He's going to tell us that those who have been excluded in the past are included in the present. He's telling us that those

who were on the outside can now be on the inside. Those who were considered losers can now be winners. He's going to talk about the church.

This is hard for us because when we think... We're Americans. We're Westerners. We think about the individual. You think about your individual, personal relationship with Jesus. You think about your personal devotional life. You think about your personal walk with the Lord.

Well, today, Paul is going to move from *me* to *we*. I think this is why we don't know this passage as well. It's not as much about *you* as it's about *us*. Here's the big idea for you to follow this passage, because it's deep. I'm realizing Ephesians is really deep, and there's a lot we're going to cover this morning. There are three parts to what we're going to look at, so I'm going to kind of tell you before I show you.

First, we're going to see that everybody is separated from God and from one another. In fact, last week, Paul talked about us being enemies. This week, he talks about us being aliens. That's a good way to think about it. He's going to go from "You were separated" (that's going to be the first few verses we'll look at) to "Okay, you've been reconciled." In fact, he's going to talk about what's called a *double reconciliation*.

I know; big words. Double reconciliation because there was a double alienation. You were alienated from God, and you were alienated from others, and Christ brings us together with God and with one another. Then (we'll see this at the very end) it's not just *alienated* to *reconciled*; it's this interesting *unification*. You go, "What does that mean?" Well, we'll see in about 30 or 40 minutes.

01 THE NATURAL STATE OF HUMANITY IS DIVISION

Turn with me to verse 11. I want to show you this. Here's what it says: "**Therefore...**" You know, whenever you see a *therefore* you ask, "What is it there for?" It's connecting everything that was just said about the individual. Now he's moving, again, from *me* to *we*.

"**Therefore remember...**" We'll come back to that. He's going to tell them twice to remember. "**...that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision'...**" You're like, "Not another sermon on circumcision." No, it won't be. "**...by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands...**"

I need to talk to you a little bit about who the Ephesians were. I did this in the first week, but I didn't talk about *this* part, and I need to talk about this part. The Ephesians were Gentiles. That may not be important to you, and you're like, "Who

cares?" It's actually very important because all that Paul did and every church he planted... It was mostly made up of Gentiles.

I told you before he'd go to the synagogue, but very few Jews would believe. Then he'd go to the marketplace. What he ended up finding out was almost all of his churches were almost completely made out of Gentiles. So, the church at Ephesus, or the Ephesian church, is a Gentile church.

Now, here's what the Jews did, and this is what you do and what I do if we're not sophisticated. This is our natural state. We break the world up into very simple black and white. This is how people tend to break the world up: there's *us* and then there's *them*. That's how you break the world up, especially before you're sophisticated.

That's what the Jews did. For the Jews, it was the Jews, and then... Do you know what *Gentiles* means? Nations. So, here's how the Jews broke up the world: *us* (we're the good people) and *Gentiles* (everybody else). In fact, it's hard for me to explain to you (I'm going to try) how much the Jews hated the Gentiles and the Gentiles hated the Jews.

I know (we'll get into it) there's some animosity, enmity, and hostility in our nation, and I know there are groups of people in our nation that hate each other. We can talk about that. We might. But I can tell you, for sure, nobody hated each other as much as the Jews hated the Gentiles...maybe as much in our nation, but certainly not more.

Here's what happened. Here's what the Jews would say. First of all, the Jews said, "Do you know why God made the Gentiles? To keep hell hot." How much do you have to hate someone to say something like that? The Jews would say, "Hey, listen. If you see a Gentile woman, and she is in dire need, and she is giving birth, do not help her, because all you would do is bring another Gentile into the world."

If, for some reason (this rarely happened), some Jewish boy falls in love with some Gentile girl, and he decides against his parents' wishes to marry this Gentile girl, the same day of the wedding would be the day of his funeral. You can see in the passage how much they hate the Gentiles. Look at what the passage says in verse 11. They called them the *uncircumcision*. Do you know what that is? That's a derogatory and demeaning nickname.

Do you know that you only name two people? You name people you love, and you name people you hate. I don't want to know your nickname for your spouse. We tend to have nicknames for our spouse..."Honey." I mean, my parents called each other "Chubby." They were both fairly fit, but "Chubby" was their nickname for each other. Growing up, my dad called me "Butch." I don't know why. I call my kids "Buddy."

We nickname people we love. Guess who else you nickname: people you hate. You have a nickname for that annoying boss or that crazy coworker or that silly classmate. Whether you love him or hate him, no one has been more powerful in using nicknames than Donald Trump. "Crooked Hillary." "Sleepy Joe Biden." He has these nicknames, and they stick, and they define a person.

What's sad is when races are angry at each other, when ethnicities are angry at each other. The demeaning names they use for one another are so horrible they should never be spoken. Here's what I want you to know. This is all in verse 11. The natural state of humanity is hostility. I want you to be amazed that there's ever peace. It's really an achievement. We'll get into that later too.

Just think about it. Think about the history of the world. How about World War II? You had the Nazis hating the Jews. Right now, Ukraine and Russia. I was in Israel back in November, and everybody hates everybody there. The Jews hate the Arabs. The Arabs don't like the Muslims. The Muslims don't like the Armenians. They have different sides of the city.

A Messianic Jew was my tour guide, a guy in his 70s, a great guy, a godly guy. He could not help but put the Arabs down. He'd be like 90 percent normal, and then he'd see Arabs, and he'd have to say something negative about them. He'd be like, "You'll see it's an Arab village because it's dirty." He just couldn't help himself.

A couple of years ago, I was golfing in Ireland, and we had this great driver. He was about my age. He would take us to *this* golf course and then *that* golf course. If you know anything about Ireland and how the Protestants hate the Catholics and the Catholics hate the Protestants and the north hates the south, and all this...

He takes us to this golf course one time. He drops us off. We'd been hanging out with him for a couple of days. I'm looking at a guy my age, and he's visibly scared. He says, "Guys, I can't stay here. I'll pick you up in six hours. It's too dangerous for me to be here."

The history of our nation is... We don't have time to go into it in great detail. There are a lot of great things to say about our nation, but there has been hostility, animosity, and enmity. There has been racism. First it showed up in slavery, and then in segregation, and then in Jim Crow.

Not just that. There's classism. *Classism* doesn't mean the rich hate the poor and the poor hate the rich. It more means they never see each other. They send their kids to different schools, and they don't interact with each other. They shop at different grocery stores, and they live in different parts of the city.

Then there's tribalism. *Tribalism* is defined by the political parties and the ideologies and the news we choose and the silos on our social media. What I want us to see today is... This is going to be really practical for us. We're going to see how God, through Christ, brings people together.

02 WE NEED TO REMEMBER SO WE CAN REJOICE

Let's go back to verse 11 to see it together. ***"Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision'..."*** That's the nickname. ***"...by what is called the circumcision [the Jews], which is made in the flesh by hands..."***

Look at verse 12. ***"...remember..."*** That's the second time he tells us to remember. ***"...that you were at that time..."*** He's going to tell us five things of our condition before Christ. Remember, last week, in the beginning of chapter 2, he told us about our condition before Christ. We always need the bad news before the good news.

Here it is, five things: First, ***"...separated from Christ..."*** Second, ***"...alienated from the commonwealth of Israel..."*** Third, ***"...and strangers to the covenants of promise..."*** Fourth, ***"...having no hope..."*** Fifth, ***"...and without God in the world."*** He wants to remind us (I think this needs to be said) of what our lives were like before Christ.

I want you to know this, and I feel like I need to say this: nobody is born a believer. No one comes into the world as a Christian. Normally, I can tell if I'm talking to somebody who's religiously lost... They're not really a Christian. They're in church, but they're not in Christ. When I tell them I became a Christian at 16, they look confused.

As my friend said, growing up in church doesn't make you a Christian any more than growing up in a garage will make you a car. Everybody has a moment (it might be at 6, it may be at 16, or it may be at 60) where they crossed a line and realized, "I was separated, and now I'm reconciled to God."

Now, if you're 6, you wrestle. If you grew up in a Christian home, you go, "I don't feel this as much even though that was reality." For me, at 16, I can see what the first 15 years of my life were like. If you ever meet somebody who comes to faith in Christ at 30 or 40 or 50, they will tell you this was their past. So, I want to unpack all five of these briefly for us.

The first thing we're told is they are *without Christ*. Verse 12 says, ***"...remember that you were at that time separated from Christ..."*** Now, we know this, but Jesus Christ

came into the world through the Jewish nation and the Jewish people. He's saying, "You were cut off from Christ."

Who is Jesus? Well, he's the Messiah. He's the Anointed One. He's the Savior. Here's what it means. By the way, when we look at this, I want us to not just think of ourselves before we knew Christ. I want us to think about how this is the condition of people today in our city and in our nation apart from the gospel.

First, they have no Savior. Now, what does this mean? This means they're trying to find someone else or something else to save them. One of the things I really want to do up here in my teaching and preaching ministry is to help us not to think, for example, that Christians have a savior and the world doesn't have a savior. The world is always looking for something to save them.

Here's how it works. Let me tell you how it functionally works. This will make sense in a second. Everybody creates a functional hell and a functional heaven, and then they find something that will bring them out of their functional hell into their functional heaven. It's called their *savior*, and they worship it. Every person does this all the time.

So, imagine that your functional hell is being single. You don't want to be single. You don't want to be lonely. You don't want to, whatever. So, what is your functional heaven? Marriage or a deep romantic relationship. So, what is your savior? That boyfriend or girlfriend who comes into your life.

Have you ever met somebody who hasn't had a romantic relationship in a long time, and then someone comes into their life? The only word you can really have is they are obsessed. This happens every once in a while. You need to grab theological language to describe what's happening. This is a worship issue with this person.

Have you ever wondered why people are so obsessed with fitness and eating healthy and exercising and CrossFit and all that stuff? Well, for some people it's just a hobby, but for some people, their functional hell is to be out of shape and overweight and unhealthy, and their functional heaven is to have a beach body. So, what is their savior? Whatever gets them there, an eating plan or an exercise plan.

Why are people so obsessed with their jobs and their careers and their education? Again, sometimes you go, "I need almost theological language for this." It's because their functional hell is to be poor or to be insignificant, so they will worship the job that is their savior to get them to their functional heaven of financial freedom.

The first thing we're told about them is the worst thing we're told about unbelievers: they do not understand Jesus Christ as their Savior. Secondly, we're told they're

alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. That means they have no Christian community.

I don't know if you saw this. About a week or two ago, the surgeon general of the United States of America came out and said, "We have a crisis and an epidemic of loneliness in our country." It's a pretty big deal when the surgeon general says, "This is big enough I'm going to write a report and make a statement. I am concerned about this crisis."

People are lonely. You have no idea how lonely certain people are. I know some of you go, "I've never met a lonely person." You wouldn't, because they're lonely. They're not here. They're in their mother's basement. They're playing video games all day. They're angry at the world.

We're told the number of people who live by themselves... And it's not wrong to live by yourself, but we're told that the number of people who live by themselves has doubled in the last 20 years. So, people are lonely. Here's what you're trying to do when you're trying to find community. Part of what I want to do is try to articulate things.

When you're trying to find community, when you're trying to find friendship, here's what you're looking for. We don't always articulate this, but this is what you are looking for. You're looking for something bigger to bring you together. C.S. Lewis (you know, the guy who wrote Narnia) famously said that all true friendship starts when one person says to the other, "You too? I thought I was the only one."

What happens in friendship, what happens in true community, is there's something bigger that's bringing us together. It might be we both love a certain sports team. It could be a bunch of different things. We're looking for something bigger. We could both love music. We both love video games. We both love movies. Something bigger is bringing us together.

What we need is actually a community with something much bigger than any of us...God...that brings us together. There are a lot of reasons marriages fail. One of the reasons, though, is if I'm trying to find everything in you and you're trying to find everything in me... We need something bigger we're both trying to find something in.

So, the first thing we're told is they have no Christ. The second thing is they have no community. They're looking for it in CrossFit and other groups and even in causes. Why is there such an obsession with causes in our nation? Because it's something bigger that brings people together.

Thirdly, we're told they are *strangers to the covenants of promise*. This is very interesting to note. We're told the first thing, the most important thing, is they don't know Christ, but then the two things God uses to bring people to Christ are mentioned next. Do you see that? It's the people of God and the Word of God. *Covenants of promise* is shorthand for the Word of God.

Here's a way to think about it. This happens often. Whenever I'm talking to somebody and they're like, "My son is in college, and he's not a believer" or "My daughter is living in New York City, and she's not a believer. What should we do, and how should we pray?" I don't have a really clear plan, but my answer is always the same.

"We should be praying for two things: that somehow the people of God get around her and the Word of God gets in her. So, send her another book that might have the Word of God in it. Send her a song. Send her a movie about the Word of God. Send whatever. Let's pray that God sends laborers into her life, and let's pray that they plant a great church near her and someone invites her."

We're told they are strangers of the covenants of promise. Now, why use that phrase? It's shorthand for the Word of God, but why *covenants*? I won't get into all this, but *covenant* is the larger story of the whole Bible. That's a good way to think about the Bible. You could think *promise*, basically...promise made, promise fulfilled.

What's interesting is we live in what's called *postmodernity* or *post-postmodernity*. It doesn't really matter. That's what people say. They've tried to define the water we're swimming in and what defines postmodernity. This is very interesting. They say what defines postmodernity is the collapse of the metanarrative. What the Bible gives you is a metanarrative. It gives you a bigger story that you're a part of.

Think about the average person. I don't know if you *are* the average person, but let me tell you, for the average person in our nation, their family is fractured through divorce or through transient living. People don't know their grandparents. They don't know the story of their family, so there's no metanarrative for their family.

Then how about with our nation? We're having a big debate on what the story of our nation is, and patriotism is low, especially among young people a lot of times. There's no story of our nation. Then there's no religious affiliation. People aren't going to church, so there's no theological story. So, think about this. The average person has no greater story their life is connected to, so they're all about self-expression, self-awareness, and self-fulfillment, which leads to the fourth thing we're told.

In some ways, the saddest conclusion is that *they have no hope*. They're nihilistic. Now, I didn't know this, but at the time this was written, the Roman Empire was as nihilistic as it had ever been. See, I always thought the Roman Empire was up and to

the right until it wasn't, but this was a very dark time in the Roman Empire. This was a time where people were writing things like, "It's better to never have been born than to be born. It's better to die young than to live and see much trouble."

We live in a time right now that's very nihilistic. I don't know if you've heard of this, but there's a phrase called *deaths of despair*, and they're increasing in our nation. *Deaths of despair*, of course, includes suicide, but it's all types of deaths that are connected to having no hope. It's opioid abuse. It's drug overdose. It's reckless behavior. And here's why.

An 18-year-old or 19-year-old shows up on a college campus, and this is basically what they're taught: "Hey, I want to teach you a couple of things. Welcome to class. Welcome to the university. Let me teach you this. You came from nobody, and you are here for no purpose, and when you die you go nowhere." Do you understand how people could say, "Well, then when it's too painful, I'm going to end it"?

They were separated from Christ, alienated from God's people, strangers to the covenants of promise; therefore, having no hope. Then he just summarizes it again: "...and without God." He starts and ends with "They don't have God."

03 JESUS BRINGS NEAR AND GIVES PEACE

Then the big transition happens, just like it happened earlier in the chapter. I want you to see this. Turn with me to verse 13. ***"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."*** If you remember, in verse 4... We had all this bad news in verses 1-3, and then we got a "But God..." Now we got all this bad news in the first two verses *here*, and then we get a "But now..." There are some big *buts* in the Bible, and I cannot lie. This is one of them.

Here's what I want you to know. I want you to have a "But now" Christianity in your life. I want you to have a "But now" marriage. We're going to talk about this in a little bit, I think. The reason reconciliation is so hard is the past. It's that in your marriage there have been ten thousand paper cuts over the last two decades. What would it look like for both of you to say, "But now, by the grace of God, because of what Christ has done..."?

Some of you need a "But now" family. You're isolated. You're living your separate lives. Sometimes you just have to repent and go, "We wasted five years. I'm so sorry." Usually Dad has to get up and go, "It's my fault, but now..." Some of you need to have a "But now" new self-image. You're going to view yourself completely differently because of what Christ has done.

Now, here's what we're told here. We're told two realities are now true. I want to break these up, take a little time. First is *we're near to God*. It says, "But now, because of Christ, we are brought near to God." In Winston-Salem, in the Southeast, in 2023, I feel like I have to say you don't bring yourself near to God; God, in Christ, brings you near to him.

I don't know if we think... This is how they used to think. I don't think people still think this anymore, but people used to think, for a long time, that their religious activity and their religious performance and their moral effort brought them to God. I've told you before I'm a recovering Catholic.

I can remember I was in eighth grade and about as unsaved as you possibly could be. I was sitting in a confirmation class in eighth grade in Catholic church. We had to go through this whole process, and I can't remember every detail of it, but I remember it's a big deal because the bishop comes into town.

The bishop was in town, and he was speaking to us. At the end of confirmation, he said, "Guys, congrats. You got the Holy Spirit." I didn't feel like I had the Holy Spirit, and I didn't. There's an old way of thinking that we do certain rituals and routines and certain rhythms in our life and that brings us near to God. What we're told is, actually, God brings us near to himself.

Now this is interesting. I thought about this for a while. I don't know what you think. I don't know if people *want* to be near God. I mean, that *is* good news if you understand the gospel, but imagine going to the center of Wake's campus or going to the center of downtown or going anywhere and just going up to talk to people.

You don't have an agenda. This isn't drive-by evangelism. You genuinely care and are concerned about these people, and you just ask them, "Do you want to be close to God?" I don't know what they're going to say. I mean, you might find somebody who says, "Yes. Can you tell me how?" I think you're going to get a lot of nice "noes" or "Not really" or "I've never thought about that."

There are a couple of reasons for that. Most people don't understand God rightly, and they think, "God doesn't want to be near to me." We don't want to be near somebody who doesn't want to be near us. What you need to hear by the grace of God is God wants to be near you.

That may hurt your head. If you're thinking theologically, you go, "Well, how is that possible? Isn't God near everybody?" Yes. Here's what this is talking about. This is talking about a relational nearness, not a physical nearness. Every married couple knows it is possible to be sitting on the couch physically right next to each other and be physically very close but be relationally very distant.

What we're told is because of what Christ has done, we can now be relationally close to God. It's not like we get more of God's presence in the sense that God is omnipresent. You're like, "Isn't he near everybody?" Yes, but there's also what's called the *manifest* or *felt* presence of God. There's also what's called the *indwelling* presence of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The first thing we're told is that God wants to be near you, and he will bring you near because of Christ, and that is a relational nearness. There's a second thing we're told that's also very important. It's that *Christ gives us peace*. I want you to see this. Look at verse 14. The word *peace* here is going to show up four times in this passage. I want you to see this.

"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility..." We'll come back and talk about that. ***"...by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two..."***

Here it is again. ***"...so making peace..."*** So, he *is* peace and he *makes* peace. ***"...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace..."*** That's the third time it's used. ***"...to you who were far off and peace..."*** Fourth time it's used. ***"...to those who were near."***

So, what is peace? I've told you before these are hard words to define. That's why Jesus told stories. But let me try to define the word *peace*. There are really two dimensions when you think about peace. There's an internal and an external dimension. They're both important, and Christ can accomplish both for us.

Internal peace is the lack of worry or lack of concern or lack of anxiety internally in spite of things not going well around you externally. That's a certain type of peace. By the way, we're told that Jesus *is* our peace. Whenever I say that, all of the Christians in the room make this listening noise. I say, "Peace is a person," and everybody goes, "Mm-hmm. That's good. Peace is a person." But we don't really know what that means.

How is peace a person? Here's the best way I can think about this. If you've ever had a young child in your home... When the child is somewhere between the ages of 2 or 3 up to 6 or 7 years old, their mom is peace for them. I'm assuming a good relationship between the mom and child. If that relationship is strong, then for that child, to be near their mom, to be around their mom, to see their mom, and to be close to their mom is the same thing as peace.

This is why right around 2 or 3 years old some kids start to have separation anxiety. It's really interesting. Separation anxiety happens at the exact same time that object permanence happens in your development. As soon as you realize something can be there and then leave and not come back, that's when you get separation anxiety. It's usually from Mom. Dad can leave for work and the kid is like, "Bye!" Mom can't go to the bathroom.

There is a relational peace. We can basically say, "I know Jesus Christ, and to be in relationship with him... Even though I don't know what the future holds, I know who holds the future. He has handled my greatest problems already...the wrath of God and my need for forgiveness. He's going to handle every other problem."

There's an internal peace. That's the lack of worry internally, lack of anxiety internally, even and especially when everything is not going right externally. There's a second type of peace, and that's the peace with one another. That's really talked about in the word *harmony* or the Old Testament word *shalom*.

There was a family at my old church. We'll call them the Valentis, because that was their name. They were a great family. They were like a biblical family. They had seven kids...six daughters. I know. Separate wedding fund, for sure. My wife and I would go over to their house, and every time I went there, it was like going to the garden of Eden.

Some of you have been in houses like this. Maybe you *have* a house like this. You walk in and there's peace. Dad is trying to serve and sacrifice and lay his life down for his wife, and she's trying in response to love and respect and submit to him. The kids aren't perfect, but they love Mom and Dad, and they love each other, and they're trying to obey their parents. The parents are trying not to exasperate or be overbearing with the kids. It's just like the garden of Eden.

That happens when you are all looking at the same thing and have the same priorities. That's how harmony happens. There's internal peace and there's external peace. Now look at what it says here. He is our peace. We talked about that. That's the image of a 3-year-old with their mom. But then he *makes* peace. This is helpful to know. It's just obvious, but we need to say this.

Peace does not happen naturally. Peace does not happen normally. Even though we all wish it was true, peace does not happen by avoiding something. Some of us think, "Well, we'll just never have *that* conversation with our spouse." Wrong. This is what the Bible teaches us. This is why I love the honesty of the Bible. Peace only happens when you deal with the problem.

Some of you have not dealt with the problem in your marriage. You know this because one or both of you are relational archaeologists. "Back in 1995, we were at my mother's house, and you yelled at me." Relational archaeologist. Really, what it's telling me or telling you or telling us is the problem has not been dealt with.

We're told that Jesus Christ killed the hostility by being killed. In fact, if you look back at the verse, it says there was a dividing wall of hostility. Now what is *that*? Well, that's three things actually. There was a literal wall. I told you earlier when I was in Israel I got to go to what remains of the temple. It's a big structure, and there are many walls and many courts. There was something called the *Court of the Gentiles*.

There was a wall that divided the Jews from the Gentiles. They basically gave the Gentiles the nosebleed seats, the worst seats on the way outside. There was... They actually have this plaque in a museum, I believe, in Turkey. There was a plaque on the wall that basically said, "If any Gentile climbs over or crosses this wall, he or she will be responsible for their own death."

We're told here that Jesus breaks down the dividing wall of hostility. That's religion. So, there are religious barriers. Religion, I've tried to tell you, is very different than Christianity. Religion basically says, "There are good people and bad people, and the good people are in *here* and the bad people are out *there*." Religion always has a territorial spirit about it. It wants to keep certain people out and only let other people in.

There was a literal wall that he's referencing. There was also... You can see there he says, "Broke down the law of commandments with its ordinances." This is the ceremonial law. So, what separates people? Well, religion. So he breaks that down. Then culture. What is culture? That's hard to define, but a large part of culture is language. After language, it's food and fashion. It's diet and dress. He's going to begin to remove *those* barriers as well.

Then the third are the social and political walls. Those are the hardest, in some ways, because it's everything everybody has done to each other in the past, and that's what makes reconciliation so difficult. We have to pull it up, and we have to be able to talk about it.

If you want real peace in your marriage, you may have to fight for two months every night about everything you've ever avoided in your marriage, but wouldn't that be worth it to have 20 or 30 years of peace on the other side, and you know where to put it because of what Christ has done?

Look at what it says Christ did here. If you go back to the passage, we're told something very interesting. The word *one*... I'm always looking in the Bible (and you

should be too) for what's repeated. Do you see there? It says, "That he might make us..." In verse 14, *one*. In verse 15, *one new man*. In verse 16, *one body*. So, there's *one*, *one new man*, and *one body*.

Here's what happens. Here's the unification. Remember, I told you there was separation and there was reconciliation. Now there's unification. Paul uses this interesting phrase. He says, "I'm going to make you one." Here's what's interesting. This is a question you and I have never asked before, but here was a big question. In fact, this question was such a big question that in Acts 15 the first council of the church is about this question.

Here's the question they were worried about but you've never thought about: Does a Gentile need to become a Jew to become a Christian? You're like, "That has never kept me up." Does a Gentile need to become a Jew to become a Christian? That was the question. That's all of the debates of "Do you need to be circumcised?" and all that kind of stuff.

Here's what Paul is telling us. He's saying that when a Gentile becomes a Christian, he doesn't become a Jew. He's telling us that when a Jew becomes a Christian, he doesn't become a Gentile. They become something completely new. That word *new* there... It says, "One new man." I don't do this a lot, but this is important. I'm going to take you into the Greek for a second, the original language.

There are two words in Greek for *new*. There's *neos* and *kainos*. *Neos* means new in relation to time. It basically means updated and renovated. If you're like, "I want the new iPhone," you're talking about *neos*. It's like, "It has a little bit better camera. It's a little faster." Right? If you're like, "I want the new Ford Explorer," what you mean is "The grill is a little different, and they changed the seats a little bit, and it has Apple AirPlay." It's new in relation to time.

That's not the word Paul uses. That would be a great word, and that would mean something. That would basically mean, "I took Jews and Gentiles, and I kind of updated both." He uses the word *kainos*. It's new in relation to kind. It means we didn't beforehand even have a category for this. It's like when Henry Ford basically said, "If I asked people 'What do you want?' they would have told me they wanted a faster horse. Instead I gave them a car." That's new in kind.

It's "Oh man! Isn't the railroad system and traveling across the country in a train amazing?" It was until the Wright brothers came. We now have the airplane. That's new in kind. Right now, we're having a conversation, as a nation, of what AI (artificial intelligence) is. It's new in kind. What Paul is telling us is when you come to Christ, what God is building is a new humanity, a new society, a completely new species.

04 WHO WE NOW ARE (GROUP IDENTITY)

He ends by giving us three communal or group identities in verses 18-22. Let's look really quickly there. "***For through him [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit...***" There's the oneness again. "***...to the Father. So then you are no longer...***" Okay, that was the past. "***...you are no longer strangers and aliens...***" Here they are, three identities.

First, "***...but you are fellow citizens with the saints...***" Second, "***...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...***" Third, "***...a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.***"

I told you this at the beginning, but we tend to view our identity as Christians individually. We're like, "God is my shepherd, and I'm his sheep." It's partially true. You're a sheep, but you're part of a bigger flock. "Oh, isn't it awesome? God is my Father, and I'm his son or daughter." True, but you're part of a family.

Here we're given three final group identities. That's very interesting because we're having a conversation in our nation right now about group identity. You want to have the right group identity. You don't want your group identity to be your suffering. You don't want your group identity to be some ideology you have.

God, through Paul, gives us three group identities: *kingdom, family, temple*. He's telling us that we're citizens. This is important for us to know. I am very patriotic. The older I get the more patriotic I am. The more I travel... I remember when I went to Mumbai, I came back from Mumbai and wanted to get on the ground and kiss the American floor. I am so grateful to be an American, but we have to be Christian first. We have to be Christian Americans.

See, here's a little bit about (for both of you who will care about this) the history of world missions. One of the critiques of early American missions was Americans... They meant well, but Americans would go to India and China, or they would go anywhere, and they would try to make them Christian but also make them Western. They would try to make them Christian, and then they would try to make them American. It was later viewed as almost a form of imperialism.

It was guys like Hudson Taylor and William Carey, these guys we love... They dressed like the people, and they said, "I may have come from America, but I did not come to

make you American. I came that you might be Christian." So, we are not American Christians; we are Christian Americans.

Secondly, a *family*. If you can get this in your bones and in your joints and in your marrow, it solves a thousand problems. The local church is a family. It's the number-one way the Bible talks about the local church. We're just brothers and sisters, and the pastors are the dads, and that's it.

It starts to make sense. You're like, "Okay, then. If we fight, we fight like family." We're going to fight. That's why you get in a Community Group and you're like, "It's going to be hard, and they're going to annoy me. When I was young, my sister annoyed me. Now my sister in Christ annoys me." But you're like, "I'm not leaving. I'm part of the family."

The third thing is *temple*. That's very interesting. Paul mixes metaphors. He'll often do this. It's a temple that grows? That doesn't make sense. He's trying to teach us a couple of things. He's saying that we're a stone or a brick or a block in the temple and that this temple continues to be built every time a new person comes to faith in Christ. We're one temple, though we're black and white and rich and poor and Asian and American. He said one temple is coming together.

The language of the temple is to be cemented together, to be brought together by Christ. Again, it's one of those things that's easy to talk about. "Oh, yeah. Jesus brings people together." I want to give you an illustration that I think helps. To do so, we have to talk about mayonnaise. Do you like mayonnaise? Some people don't like mayonnaise. I like just the right amount of mayonnaise on my sandwich.

Here's the thing about mayonnaise. Mayonnaise is a very interesting substance. I'm not a chemist, but what happens in mayonnaise is mayonnaise has things hanging out with one another and getting along that never get along anywhere else...namely, oil and water. So, how do you get oil and water, which, let's just say metaphorically, hate each other (Jew and Gentile, or whatever it is)...

How do you get them to hang out together? Well, chemists found out there's something called an *emulsifier*. In mayonnaise, the emulsifier is egg. It's almost as if the egg says to the water, "Water, listen. Connect with me. I know you don't like oil, but just hang out with me." Then the egg walks over to the oil and says, "Oil, connect with me. I know you don't like water. Don't worry about that right now." As they both connect to the egg, they connect to one another.

Here's what I want you to know. Jesus Christ on the cross became the emulsifier for all peoples. When you worship him, and when he becomes preeminent and the priority in your life, you're going to be connected to him, and you're going to look

around and realize, "I'm connected to people who in the past I didn't even like and never thought I would be connected to."

It's hard to love people who have hurt you. It's hard to love people who have done things to you in the past. I don't know if you ever heard of Henry Gerecke. Henry Gerecke was a Lutheran pastor who was also a chaplain in World War II. Imagine this. World War II is over, and thank God for that. You go home, and you're glad to go home, even though you were an army chaplain. You're just glad to be home. You're glad the war is over.

Then Henry Gerecke, several years later... He's back in America, and he gets a phone call. See, Henry Gerecke was very good at German. So, he gets the phone call he was not expecting. Imagine getting this phone call. "Henry, would you consider coming to the Nuremberg Trials?" If you don't know, the Nuremberg Trials were when they put on trial the 22 men who were under Hitler and responsible for the deaths of six million Jews.

Imagine this phone call. They said, "Henry, these 22 men need a pastor. Would you come and minister to them?" So then he has to go talk to his wife. Back then, travel was not as easy as it is today. He said, "Honey, for me to do this, I'm going to have to be gone for 12 to 18 months, and I'm going to have to learn to love people I hate."

I wonder if he thought something like this passage. "But if I don't go, they're going to be without hope. If I don't go, there's going to be no Word of God getting to them, and if I don't go, I don't know if they're ever going to be connected to another Christian." So he goes.

If you read about it, the 22 men were afraid he was going to leave. They fell in love with him. They wrote his wife a letter at one point and said, basically, "Please let him stay. He means so much to us." Henry, by his own admission, says he led six of these men to Christ and ended up serving them Communion right before their execution.

If there were ever outsiders, it was those 22 men, but Henry Gerecke decided, "I don't want them to be without hope, without God, and without Christ." What does it look like for us, as a church, to pursue both vertical reconciliation and horizontal reconciliation, to bring people near and to preach peace? Let's do that. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for Henry Gerecke and his example. In reading about him... The trials end, and he gets back on the plane, and I think he heads back to Wisconsin and volunteers the rest of his life. Probably no one even knows all that he did. Lord, there's a lot of pain in people's lives. Our lives are only as good as the relationships we're in.

Lord, would you help us to see you, Jesus, as the emulsifier, that we would connect to you and in doing so would look around and find ourselves connected to all different types of people? Lord, would we view ourselves as citizens of heaven, not just citizens of America? Lord, would we view ourselves as a family of brothers and sisters? Would we view ourselves as a temple that's continuing to be built up until that last great day? In Jesus' name, amen.