

United

Ephesians 2:11-22

The Power of the Gospel Unites us (v. 11-13) by removing what divides us (v. 14-18) and gives us a brand-new identity. (v. 19-22)

1. The Power of the Gospel Unites us ... (v. 11-13)

One of the great benefits of the gospel's power is that it creates communities of faith and it creates them out of people that are very different from one another.

... the gospel takes people of all tribes, tongues, and nations and turns them into loving family members.

In this section Paul begins by telling us what we were.

In verse 11 Paul Points out to the Ephesian church the two primary divisions in the world ...

- The Jews, Paul calls these “the circumcision”
- The Gentiles ... and Paul calls them “the uncircumcision”

If you look closely you can see it is “the circumcision” that labels the Gentiles “The uncircumcision.”

And these Ephesians (“the uncircumcision”) were (past tense):

- Separated from Christ
- Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel
- Strangers to the covenant of promise

In verse 12 Paul is speaking specifically about the Ephesians ... the Gentiles ... most of us.

... and the Gentiles and the Jews lived in two different worlds, with two different mindsets.

... Then Paul goes one step further to show us the power of the Gospel.

Paul says in verse 13- YOU -that is the Jews AND the Gentiles- that were far off (or far apart) have been brought near (together) by the blood of Jesus Christ.

This is God's plan!

God planned that He would take the two (the circumcision and the uncircumcision) and in Himself (by His own presence and power) and make one man ...

... actually, the word is "anthropos"—humanity.

God, through the blood of Jesus, by the power of the gospel in himself—would take the two groups of humanity and make a new humanity.

Paul want us to know who we are ... who God says we are ...

... a new humanity in Christ Jesus.

... (Look at verse 16) God brings peace between the two ... He creates this new humanity by first reconciling both groups to God through the power of the cross.

EXAMPLE OF THE TUNING FORK A440.

In other words ...

The Power of the Gospel Unites us by removing what divides us and gives us a brand-new identity.

2. ... by removing what divides us... (v. 14-18)

Two questions:

One, **what is it that divides us?**

Paul mentions it in verse 14 and 16 ... “the dividing wall of hostility.”

In verse 14 Jesus has broken down this dividing wall of hostility ...

... in verse 16 by killing the hostility...

Question two: **what is the hostility?**

As with the first question, Paul gives us a clear answer...

... the hostility is ... *“The law of the commandments expressed in the ordinances.”*

Paul is saying that the law God gave Moses divides people...

... So, does that mean the law is bad?

Not at all ... Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:8 *“Now we know the law is good...”*

... The Old Testament tells us that the God gave the law to the Jews so that the Jews could be a light to the nations...

...In other words, by the Jews adherence to the law the gentiles would be able to see a godly, loving, just, and holy society ...

... How the Jews lived for God would attract the Gentiles to God and His glory

BUT THAT IS NOT WHAT HAPPENED!

The Jews loved the Law ...

... They were actually proud that they were the ones who had the law

Here is problem!!

The things we most cherish and admire about ourselves are the things that divide us.

When God gives us good gifts ...

... there is something about the sinful human heart that takes those good gifts and elevates them up to an absolute value

... then looks at everyone who doesn't have what you have and causes you to look down on them.

... the good gifts becomes the basis of hostility ...

... this is not just true with individuals, it is true of groups of people

... races, cultures, classes of people

Because they had the law the Jews felt superior over those who did not have the law.

Sin has so polluted the human heart that we take the best things about ourselves and we use those things to bolster our self-esteem ...

... (and here is how we bolster our self-esteem) ... we take pride in the best things about ourselves and then look down on anyone who doesn't have those things in them.

The best example of this is the prayer of the Pharisee in Luke 18:11

... The Pharisee lifts his eyes to heaven and prays, "O Lord I thank thee I am not like other people."

That's how the sinful heart operates ...

... That's where the sinful heart gets its self-esteem...

Remember the song: **A country boy can survive** There is a line in that song that says:

*I had a good friend in New York City
He never called me by my name just hillbilly
My Grandpa taught me how to live off the land
And his taught him to be a business man*

It's a song about someone who takes pride in the fact they were born and raised in the country ... instead of being born and raised in the city.

... as if somehow being raised in the city is “lesser”

Think about what is happening in that song—

You see, ultimately our identity doesn't come from our talents, possessions, or characteristics ...

... our identity comes from those things in comparison to others

People aren't proud of being rich ... they are proud of being richer than the next person.

... not proud of being talented ... but being more talented than the next person

... not just being a good parent ... but being a better parent than someone else.

We are hard workers, so we despise the lazy person.

We are educated, so we despise those that aren't.

Israel had the law (and often didn't obey it) but they still despised those that didn't have the law.

... The sinful heart gets its identity (not from something good or done well) but from being better than the next person.

The hard and painful truth is this:

We don't see the differences of others as being different ... we see the differences of others as being worse because they are different ...

This is true about ethnic groups, national citizenship, culture, education, parenting styles, economic status ...

The sinful heart is so attached to these identity markers that these things become how we "shore up" our self-worth ...

So that is this is the problem what is the solution?

This is interesting... Look at verse 14 ...

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... (Eph 2:14-15)

Don't forget that Jew and Gentile is every race in the world.

God's purpose in grace is to create inside the church a "new man" or "a new humanity"

Let me illustrate: If you are in a club (golf, fishing) you share that common interest with everyone in the club ... you connect in one or two ways ...

... but when you share the same race or culture, that is a much more profound thing ...

.. because race and culture affects every area of your life so someone who is the same race and culture as you, you feel thousands of connections so this is deeper and more profound

Paul is saying that when you become a Christian, even though you are Chinese, American, French, Hispanic ... even though you share thousands of connections with other Chinese, American ...

... when you become a Christian, that is the most profound thing and it creates deeper and more extensive connections than anything else...

... so that when you become a Christian ... although you are still American and feel that American connection ...

... you feel greater connection to those, even if they aren't American, who have believed on Jesus ...

... a greater connection with those who share your faith ... than those of your own nation and culture who do not share that same faith.

God's purpose is to create inside the church "a new humanity" through the transformative power of the gospel.

The Power of the Gospel Unites us by removing what divides us ... and that makes a deeper connection than any other connection.

... this is the way God creates a new humanity ...

... this is how the far are made near.

Look at me:

- I am Christian first and white second ...
- I am Christian first and American second ...
- I am Christian first and a man second ...
- I am Christian first and educated second ...
- I am Christian first and a baptist second ...
- I am Christian first and WHATEVER second ...

Here in Ephesians Paul is saying that because of what Jesus has done something can happen that has never happened before in the history of the world ...

... we can get over these horrible divisions that has kept us from living in peace.

Racism and division will never be eradicated by legislation and public policy because ultimately the problem is not a problem of education or culture...

... the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart ...

... and the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to change the human heart.

The Power of the Gospel Unites us by removing what divides us and gives us a brand-new identity.

3. ... and gives us a brand-new identity.

In verse 12 you can see that our old identity was “alienated and strangers” but in verse 19 Paul says that this is no longer true.

Being reconciled to God breaks down the dividing wall by removing the dividing hostility and the result is that:

- A supernatural family is born
- A supernatural spiritual community is created in Christ Jesus

... This is something brand-new!!!

This is not just a nice thing ... this is a necessary thing.

Let me illustrate by reading a warning given by the writer of Hebrews.

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb 3:12-13)

We are to “take care” of each other, to assist one another because the real danger of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin exists.

Sin is deceitful and all of us live with some degree of self-denial.

... all the way back in Genesis 4 God warned Cain that “sin was crouching at the door of the human heart.”

... Here is what is so great ...

This supernatural family, this spiritual community that comes through the power of the gospel creates a ...

... for lack of a better word ... a protective closeness.

Look at verse 19-20 Paul uses three pictures to show the growing closeness that exists within the community of faith.

v. 19—fellow citizen

... members of the household of God

v. 20—building stones “being joined together.

Peter writes that Christians are like *living stones are being built up as a spiritual house...*(1Pe 2:5)

Each one of these things illustrate greater intensity in closeness.

Fellow citizen... citizens of the same country live miles apart but serve and love the same king.

Family members of the same household live feet apart and share the same parent.

Then **building stone** ... we are adjacent to each other. ... each one absolutely dependent upon one another.

This supernatural community, this gospel community causes us to live in relationship with each other so deeply ...

... at such an intimate level that it allows us to talk with each other about these “weighty sins” that beset us, harden us, blind us

... to talk with each other in healthy, powerful, and productive ways.

Paul says this growing togetherness causes us to grow into a “holy temple” ... a dwelling place for God.

The ultimate proof that God is **not present** is division and disunity feelings of superiority and jealousy.

The glorious evidence of God’s power and presence is unity and humility.

Sin says, “I am better than you therefore we must be at odds with one another.”

The gospel says, “regardless of the life we live everyone is equally lost.”

Sin says, “You are different therefore you are inferior.”

The Gospel says, “In Christ we are all one.”

The Power of the Gospel Unites us by removing what divides us and gives us a brand-new identity.

When you become a Christian, you are not just a little different ...

... the gospel restructures the way think about yourself

... the very way we identify ourselves is restructured.

The new identity comes two ways

First-The gospel destroys the sinful internal comparison apparatus ... it destroys identity by comparison.

Back in the first part Paul said that the law created a wall (a barrier) between Jew and Gentile ... this was not allegorical.

... There was a literal wall in the Jewish temple.

... The Jews were closer to the Holy Place, but because they Gentiles were considered “unclean” they worship in the Gentile court which was behind a wall ... further away.

The gospel destroys that wall

... both the NEAR and the FAR need to be reconciled to God.

... until you hear the gospel you do divide the world ... its one of the ways you feel better about yourself.

The gospel destroys that

... The gospel says you no longer get your identity by looking down on other different people!

... All people are equally lost and equally in need of Jesus.

The first thing the gospel does is it humbles you.

The second thing the gospel does is it accepts you in Jesus you and sees you as perfect and righteous in Christ.

... that affirmation grounds you to the core and frees you!

... you don't need to be better than other people to have peace, hope, joy ...

You are no longer scratching in the dust to **achieve** your identity because in Jesus Christ you have **received** a better and glorious identity.

... and you are bonded to everyone who has received this exact same identity.

Let me end by showing you how exactly how Jesus has done this ...

... there is an amazing statement in verse 16—**It says that Jesus reconciled us to God and one another on the cross by killing the hostility.**

This verse says that on the cross God killed hostility... WHAT does that mean?

In 2 Cor. 5:21 that God made Jesus, who knew no sin, God made Him to be sin for us ...

It doesn't mean that Jesus became hostile on the cross, it means that Jesus became hostility.

Because we have been hostile to each other, God should be hostile toward us ... **but that is not what happened.**

... on the cross God the Father treated Jesus as sin should be treated ... in order that He (God the Father) might treat us as Jesus deserves to be treated.

Wow! Could anything be more wonderful???

Yes, it could ... In fact, after dying for us and bearing our shame and sin Hebrews 2:10 says that Jesus, right now, **is not ashamed to call us brothers.**

... at the cost of Jesus' life on the cross God killed hostility so that we might be united together.

If a man dying on the cross for everybody ...

... If Jesus breathing his last breath praying for forgiveness for His enemies ...

... If this is at the core of who you are

... Then it unites you with everyone who also find their identity and existence in Jesus Christ

... It should enable us to be a church that has the ability to rescue a troubled world

I end: Jesus gave himself to destroy the hostility between people ... go thou and do likewise.