

Opening Illustration:

Who knew you could have so much fun at home in the snow?

- Has anyone jumped out second story windows into the snow? Do any of you have ski slopes in your front yard?
- Who knew what an ice dam was before this winter? Has anyone been throwing pantyhose filled with rock sock onto their roofs?
- Don't you just enjoy shoveling? Especially when you just finished your driveway and the snowplow comes by again barricading the end of your driveway in with The Great Wall of Snow.
- And for you stay at home moms who have been at home with your kids for the past month, you really do enjoy spending time with your kids, and you really do love them. Don't forget that.

Who knew you could have so much fun driving with all of this snow?

- Don't you just love pulling out of your driveway and any small street around you? One person has commented that this is the closest most of us will ever get to Russian Roulette. You just have to edge out and hope for the best.
- Has anyone found himself in a game of chicken recently? You know, you're on one of those side streets with barely enough room for a dog to walk down and you find yourself face to face with an oncoming car.

Transition: One of my greatest frustrations is that the snow has made it difficult to gather as the church. A book I've been reading lately, *The Gospel*, by Ray Ortlund, puts it this way: "It is only in a church that we are members of Christ and of one another, moving forward like a well-coordinated body (1 Cor. 12:12-17). It is together that we suffer and thrive. It is together that we worship and grow and serve, according to the Word of God. That's what your church is—ground zero for the new kind of community Christ is creating in the world today for the display of his glory" (40).

The gospel isn't just about bringing salvation to individuals, as great as that is (see Eph. 2:1-10); it is about God's plan to unite all things in Christ; all people and all nations united in one new humanity. As one writer notes, "The death of Jesus is a community-creating event" (Joseph Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 131).

The Point: We should pursue unity and peace with everyone in the church because the death of Christ turns outsiders into members of the family of God.

I. Remember your former exclusion from Christ to cherish your present inclusion in Christ (11-13).

2:11-22 follows the same pattern as 2:1-10: it underscores the helplessness of our condition and then provides the solution. The difference is that in 2:1-10, everyone (Jews and Gentiles) was dead in sin and all believers (Jews and Gentiles) have been rescued by God's gracious intervention in Christ. But in 2:11-13, Paul specifically outlines the plight of the Gentiles along with God's solution.

The structure:

- “Therefore [continue to] remember... (11).
- “—[continue to] remember... (12).
- “But now... (13).

A. You (Gentiles) previously were separated from Christ (11-12).

We must understand the distinction between Jews and Gentiles:

- Gentiles did not have the physical mark of circumcision.
- Circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and his people (cf. Gen 17:11-12).
- As a result, the Jews saw the Gentiles as excluded from their social group and from their special relationship with God.
- The Jews on the other hand are the “circumcision, which is “made in the flesh by hands.” Most likely Paul intended a negative connotation: “they are not really circumcised since true circumcision is spiritual rather than physical” (Frank Thielman, cf. Rom 2:28-29; Col 2:11-12). Do you hear the ethnic tension?

Why the command to “continue to remember”? He wanted them to see how far they have really come so that they would increase in their appreciation of the work of God in their lives. Oh, how quickly we are to forget God’s grace and become arrogant and boastful. Paul gives five disadvantages of the Gentiles to the Jews, which he calls them to remember.

1. *Gentiles were separated from Christ.*
 - This is the most important item on the list. If every spiritual blessing is found in Christ (cf. 1:3-12), being outside of Christ is an enormous problem. Gentiles were separated from the hope of the coming Messiah.
2. *Gentiles were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.*
 - They were on the outside of the blessings that Israel received by virtue of her covenant with God.
3. *Gentiles were strangers to the covenants of promise.*
 - One of the primary ways that God initiated redemption and marked out the pathway of his saving purposes was through establishing covenants with his people. Most likely he is referring to the Abrahamic, David and New Covenants (cf. Gal 3:15-18).
 - Reference the Six Act Drama: 1. Creation. 2. Fall. 3. Israel. 4. Jesus. 5. The Church. 6. New Creation.
4. *Gentiles had no hope.*
 - As we look back on the Gentile’s plight, they had no hope but only a fearful anticipation of facing God’s wrath that comes upon the “sons of disobedience” (cf. 2:3). They had nothing to look forward to. No expectation that God would work in their lives. No knowledge of salvation that would include a future resurrection and eternal life.
5. *Gentiles were without God.*
 - Ironically, many Gentiles would have claimed to be devoted to gods. Yet, though they believed in many gods, they didn’t believe or desire the one true God (cf. Rom 1:18-23).

Can you imagine what it be like to be an outsider to the greatest thing on earth and have no means or ability to merit it?

B. The Death of Christ brings you to God (13).

- “If the most fundamental problem facing Paul’s Gentile readers prior to the gospel’s arrival among them was their existence ‘outside Christ’ (v. 12), then God has met this problem by placing them ‘in Christ Jesus’” (Frank Thielman, BECNT, 158).
- Jesus accomplishes this through the shedding of his blood on the cross. You don’t have to have any history or experience with circumcision, the Torah, animal sacrifices or the temple. If you have Christ, you have every spiritual blessing.
- The gospel levels the playing field for both Jews and Gentiles, and, ironically, the advantage of the Jews has been overshadowed by their rejection of Christ.

II. Pursue Unity in the Church by Displaying the Peace that Christ Brings (14-18).

This section is an excursus (or digression), showing exactly how Christ overcame the estrangement of vv. 11-12 and brought Gentiles (who were far) near to both Jews and to God. This section puts the spotlight on Christ himself rather than on God’s action through Christ. It explores how Jesus’ death brings about peace between humanity and peace with God.

A. Jesus Brings Peace to a Divided Humanity (14-15).

- “*Jesus’ death tore down the dividing wall of hostility.*”
 - What is the dividing wall of hostility?
 - Option 1: According to Josephus, there was a wall around the temple that separated the outer area where the Gentiles were permitted from the inner, more holy area, where Jews were permitted. Would a Gentile audience in Asia Minor have understood this reference?
 - Option 2: Paul was referring to the Jewish law (probably more likely).
 - The main characteristic of Judaism was observance to the Mosaic Law (the Temple, sacrifices, the Sabbath, circumcision, etc.). Jews did not eat with Gentiles and they would not intermarry with them. This would have led to hostility between Jews and Gentiles, even resulting in hatred. Thus, the wall was not a literal wall but a metaphorical one.
 - This law was both a “partition,” separating the Jews from the Gentiles and a “fence,” protecting the Jews from Gentile influences.
 - How did he break this wall down? By abolishing the law through his death.
 - What was the purpose of the law? From Paul’s point of view, the law only governed Israel for a specific period of time. “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made...” (Galatians 3:19). “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4).
 - Jesus fulfilled the law: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).
 - The law was prophetic in that it paved the way for Christ. He is the lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice, our high priest, the temple, and so much more.
 - Why did Jesus set aside the Mosaic law? Paul answers this in the rest of the 2:15b and explained below.

- *Jesus' death created a new and unified humanity*
 - As believers are united with Christ, they become united with one another across all social barriers that once divided them (note that Jesus didn't unite Jews and Gentiles in general, but Jews and Gentiles in Christ). As a result of this new created humanity, there is peace.
 - Sidebar: Is this new humanity now "lawless"? No. But Jesus has removed everything that had once divided. Jews and Gentiles don't gather in a temple in Jerusalem to worship, worship is now in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). We don't offer sacrifices, Jesus is our sacrifice. Physical circumcision is no longer required as our hearts are circumcised by Christ. We are now under the law of Christ (see 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal 5:14; 6:2; Rom 13:10). I don't follow any OT command in Scripture until I first ask how it has been fulfilled in Christ, and then, in light of this fulfillment, ask what implications it still has on me today as a follower of Christ.

B. Jesus Brings Peace to a Humanity Divided from God (16-18).

- If Paul had in mind the outer wall of the temple, here he has broken down the inner curtain that barred all access to the holiest place (cf. Luke 23:24).
 - As we saw in 2:1-3, everyone, Jews and Gentiles, are sinners and enemies of God and in need of being reconciled to him. When Jesus died on the cross, he not only fulfilled and thus set aside the law, thus creating a new people, he also removed the curse of the law that was against all humanity, keeping them from God.
- Jesus reconciles sinners in one body (both Jews and Gentiles) to God.
 - The body to which Paul refers to here is the church universal: all believers at all times in all places. In the church there are no ethnic barriers.
 - "If our churches are still divided in any way along racial or cultural lines, he would say that our gospel, our very grasp of the meaning of Jesus' death, is called into question" (N. T. Wright, *Ephesians: 11 Studies for Individuals and Groups*, 25).
 - As a church, we should seek to remove every barrier that hinders anyone in our city from encountering God through RHC. I love what Doug Logan, an African American Acts 29 pastor in Camden, NJ, says, "If you have a skittles neighborhood, your church should look like skittles." You've probably heard us say before, "We want RHC to be a thumbprint of our community."
 - What would it look like for RHC to create a gospel culture that sought to remove every single barrier that hindered anyone in our city from coming to our church?
- This unified humanity now has access to the Father "united together in the one Spirit."
 - The thrust of the text is not, "we both *alike* have access" but "we both *together* have access" (so Harold Hoehner, 388).
 - Here the three persons of the Trinity are involved in the believers' access to God. Through the work of Christ united in one Spirit, believing Jews and Gentiles have access to the Father" (Harold Boehner, 389). God is now approachable.

Jesus is our peace. He restores peace between a divided humanity and he restores peace between humanity (those near and far off) and God.

III. Grow in God's Family as a Temple Tightly Connected to Christ and Other Believers (2:19-22).

When we come to 19-22, the ethnic tension and estrangement has disappeared.

A. You now belong to a new family (19).

You were strangers (temporary foreigners) and aliens (permanent aliens in a foreign state) but now you are fellow citizens, saints, and members of the household of God.

“Just as we are *justified* with respect to God the Father upon our salvation, so also we are *familified* with respect to our brothers and sisters in Christ. And this familification is no less a positional reality than our justification. It would follow from this that just as we need to increasingly actualize the positional reality of our justification in the spiritual formation process, so also should we long to increasingly actualize the positional reality of our *familification*, as we grow into the image and likeness of Christ” (Joseph Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*).

What are characteristics of a family?

- We share our stuff with one another.
- We share our hearts with one another.
- We stay, embrace the pain, and grow up with one another.

Do you know what we call membership at RHC? Joining a family! Why is membership to a particular local church important? Why is covenant renewal important?

- “There is no churchless Christianity in the Bible. We individualistic Americans need to face that” (Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel*, 41).
- “The church is not simply a historic convenience, a useful way of organizing discipleship and mission. No, the bride of Christ, complete and perfect, is right at the heart of the climax of salvation” (Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church*).
- “You and I are one with all true Christians throughout history—Augustine, Martin Luther, Johann Sebastian Bach, and many other amazing people. That’s exciting. But the unity of the church becomes our actual experience in the unity of a church. In our local churches, what we share goes beyond our experiences with Christians in general. Being part of a church frees us from a vague idealism and gives us traction for real gospel advance that will matter forever” (Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel*, 39-40).
- . Choosing to live in isolation is easy, but belonging is costly—but much more satisfying (see Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel*, 41).

Positionally, in Christ, you are part of the family of God, the Father, with brothers and sisters in Christ. Now become in practice what you are in truth. Act like a genuine family member. Get to know your brothers and sisters in Christ. Care for them through thick and thin.

B. You are now a part of the temple of God (20-22).

Context: N. T. Wright says here that Paul takes “. . . one of the central symbols of Judaism and turn it inside out.” Why was the temple so central in Judaism? God had promised to live there. Wright continues, “It was, many believed, the place where earth and heaven met. . . . But now Paul is declaring that the living God is constructing a new temple. It consists not of stones, arches, pillars and altars, but of human beings” (N. T. Wright, *Ephesians: 11 Studies for Individuals and Groups*, 26).

- This temple was **founded** by the NT apostles (i.e. Barnabas, Timothy, Silvanus, Apollos, Paul) and prophets (not OT prophets but others who have exercised their gifts in the period after Christ's coming [cf. Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 14:24-25]).
- How did they **enter** into God's household? Through the apostolic and prophetic preaching of the gospel.
- The **cornerstone** of this temple is Christ Jesus (see Isaiah 28:16; cf. 1 Pet. 2:6).
 - The cornerstone was the first stone laid and it was laid very carefully because every other stone would be laid and measured by this stone. Thus, the cornerstone not only gives guidance, but it also gives stability.
 - Jesus is the one by which all things are measured.
 - The apostles and prophets were a foundation laid in alignment to the cornerstone and all succeeding believers are built on this foundation, causing their lives to be
 - The growth of the temple takes place "in Christ" and the temple exists "in him."
- This multiethnic temple is the fulfillment of the Jewish eschatological expectations (cf. Isa. 56:3-8).
- The purpose of this temple is to continue to grow into a dwelling place for God by his Spirit.
 - We grow, not individually, but as we are carefully fitted together with others stones.
 - The focus here in Ephesians is not individual growth but corporate growth.

"People who leave [community in a local church] do not grow. . . . Like trees repeatedly transplanted from soil to soil, these spiritual nomads fail to put down roots and seldom experience lasting and fruitful growth in their lives" (Joseph Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 1).

The concluding and summarizing point:

- The Gentiles are now placed together with the Jews in God's new temple (overcoming their alienation)
- The Gentiles are now also in the very place that God dwells (overcoming their estrangement).

How can I grow? Will you commit to our 2015 Vision of Love: "Love one another by active participation in Community Groups and covenant membership." What are some tangible ways you can do this?

The church is ground zero for the new kind of community Christ is creating in the world today and it is beautiful. Your non-believing friends might even be attracted to this gospel community before they are attracted to the gospel message. It's persuasive and powerful. So invite others to experience it. Let your gospel relationships invoke questions from your friends.