

Introduction:

- A. We are all too familiar with the idea of a wall keeping people away from a kind of life they can only dream of. We are all aware of the wall between the U.S. and Mexico to keep illegal aliens out. When we were in Cyprus there was a wall, with U.N. guards, separating the Turkish from the Greek sides. When I was young it was the haunting images of the Berlin wall built to keep East Germans from the ideas and prosperity of West Germany. I grew up hearing stories of desperate and usually deadly escape attempts and seeing the gray buildings of the East contrasted with the bright markets and corporate offices of the West.
- B. Our passage of Scripture today, **Eph. 2:11-22**, says to us, *“Remember! Once we were on the outside looking in.”* Turn to that text. While you’re looking it up let me just read a few of the preceding verses: **2:1-2a, 4-9...** And that brings us to the *Therefore* leading to **vv.11-12....**

I. ALWAYS REMEMBER HOW FAR OFF WE GENTILES WERE FROM GOD (2:11-12)

- A. You get the sense in v.11 that Jews in Bible times hated Gentiles. God had given Israel strict rules that separated their way of life from the pagans around them. God had warned them again and again from being compromised. God said, *“Come out from among them and be separate.” Be holy.* Yet God had promised Abraham that *all peoples on earth would be blessed through him.* But the Jews had long ago lost sight of that and they despised uncircumcised Gentiles. Jews said God created Gentiles to be the fuel for the fires of hell. They were forbidden from helping a Gentile woman in childbirth because they’d be guilty of

helping bring another Gentile into the world. If a Jew married a Gentile, his or her family didn't just skip the wedding; they had a funeral.

- B. It wasn't just ethnic hatred. Gentiles were completely isolated from the privileges of God's people. (The exceptions were those few people who converted to Judaism.) **V.12** uses **five phrases** that, taken together, describe just how utterly alienated we Gentiles were.
1. "You were separate from Christ." He means there was no Messiah in our future. No great future King for us, no Champion on a white horse, no Redeemer, no one to ever set things right. And when he did come, we'd be on the doomed side of his enemies. And we didn't care.
 2. "Excluded [*Alienated*] from citizenship in Israel." Israel was the nation God loved and favored, but we could not gain citizenship. There was no bright statue inviting us, "*Give me your tired, your poor.*" We were outside the fence. And we didn't care.
 3. "Foreigners to the covenants of the promise." God's relationship with Israel was defined by the covenants he made starting with Abraham, to whom he said, "*I will bless you.*" It was like a marriage. But it was only for the descendants of Abraham. God made no promises to the outsiders. We were on the outside looking in. And we didn't care.
 4. "Without hope." As Gentiles, we had nothing firm to stand on, no promise of God we could cling to. We'd look far into our future and see only darkness. We carried the weight of our sin and guilt with no hope of ever being unburdened. And we didn't care.
 5. "Without God in the world." Oh, we had gods aplenty, but we knew nothing of the true and living God. We

lived life under the frown and sentence of the Almighty God with no hope of reconciliation. We never knew the peace or love of God. And we didn't care.

- C. So Gentiles were triply alienated: First, we were dead in sin and under the wrath of God. Secondly, there was implacable hostility between us and Jews, the only people who could have led us to God. And third, we had no access to God, because as William Hendriksen put it, We were *“Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless.”* Remember where we came from! **Remember!!**

If you've been with us previous Sundays, you'll remember that each of these weeks we're exploring different things Jesus accomplished when he died for us on the cross. Now that we've **remembered** our desperate alienation, we can look at what Jesus did for us. **V.13**, *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”* We're familiar with the truth that Jesus died to forgive our sins. In fact, **Eph 1:7** emphasized that: *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.”* Here in **2:13** Jesus accomplished something else:

II. BY DYING FOR US, CHRIST MADE US ONE NEW RACE WITH COMPLETE ACCESS TO GOD (2:13-18)

- A. How could two such hostile races—Jews and Gentiles—ever be united? Jesus didn't bring both groups to the negotiation table. He didn't scold us and say, “It's time for you all to shake hands and be friends.” **V.14** says, *“He himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one.”* So we didn't just decide to put aside our differences. We were no longer two groups. How did that happen?
- B. **V.14** continues, He *“has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its*

commands and regulations.” There was an actual 5’ wall in the temple courts keeping Gentiles from getting too close to the temple itself, with stone signs warning violators of death. Paul was talking about a spiritual wall as foreboding as that. **V.15:** “*the law with its commandments and regulations.*” **God’s law was intended to be a kind of towering wall around his people.** He wanted them to be holy, to be devoted to him alone. He wanted them to completely avoid the sins and idolatry of all the pagans around them. **So his commands defined what it meant to be separate from the Gentiles.** They were what kept Jews near to God and *separate* from the Gentiles.

V.15 says Jesus “*abolished in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.*” The word means *nullified, rendered moot.* The OT law had all kinds of ceremonial commands—circumcision, priests, sacrifices, food, holy days, ceremonies, tabernacle. They were the pride and distinction of the Jews; their national identity. But they all pointed to Christ Jesus, and when he came, died and rose again, there was no longer a need for signs pointing to him.

Then there were all God’s moral laws with their unbending justice: do this and live, disobey and die. Jews took pride in the rule-keeping. Many really *were* holier-than-thou. But they could not keep either the spirit or the letter of God’s law. So ultimately the Jews, despite being God’s chosen people, were as guilty and condemned as any pagan. But when Jesus died for sin, he broke the power of the law to condemn sinners whose faith is in his righteousness in their place.

So now all who put their faith in Jesus Christ are united with him; we are all “*in him.*” If the Jews are *in him* and Gentiles are *in him*, then we are no longer either Jews or

Gentiles, but we are Christians. And that's what **v.15** says, "*His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace...*" And since we are one now, there is peace. One of the earliest Christian pastors, **Clement of Alexandria**, wrote around 200 AD, "*We who worship God in a new way, as the third race, are Christians.*" [Hughes, p.93]

- C. In this passage there are two hostilities. Hostility 1 was between Jews and Gentiles. Hostility 2 was between all people and the God they had disobeyed. Jesus not only brings Jews and Gentiles together but Jesus brought both Jews and Gentiles to God. **Vv.15b-16**, "*His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body [that's the Body of Christ, the church] ... in [this] one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*" That is, the hostility of both Jews and Gentiles with God as people who had sinned and fallen short of his glory. It's a **twofer**. Jesus brought us together and then reconciled all Jews and Gentiles who trust him to God, so that we have peace with each other, and peace with God.
- D. **Vv.17-18**... Now Jesus constantly preaches this peace to those both far and near. After his resurrection, when Jesus met his disciples for the first time, he said, "*Peace be with you!*" "*Shalom!*" Peace became a defining Christian characteristic. Jesus, through his Spirit and his people, continues to preach peace to those near and far—Jews and Gentiles alike—because we both have direct access to our Father in heaven by the Holy Spirit.

Illus.: I remember watching in amazement on the evening of Nov. 9, 1989, as the Berlin wall was torn down by ecstatic crowds, something that had seemed impossible.

As I listened to Tom Brokaw, standing there with the celebration behind him, I could hear singing in the background. *“I know that song,”* I thought with surprise. I listened closer and realized it was, *“This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made... Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”* The day Christians had prayed for had come. How much greater our joy that the wall keeping us from all the privileges of a God-blessed life has been torn down, uniting us with God’s chosen people, and bringing us into the very presence of our Father himself!

Well, this all changes everything, of course. *Illus.*: Do any of you know the song from the musical *Oliver!* where the Artful Dodger invites the orphaned Oliver Twist to join his gang?

Consider yourself at home.

Consider yourself part of the family.

We've taken to you so strong.

It's clear we're going to get along.

Consider yourself well in.

Consider yourself part of the furniture.

There isn't a lot to spare.

Who cares?.. Whatever we've got, we share!

That would be a good church song! **Vv.19-22** are the climax of this chapter, maybe the most important single passage on the church in the New Testament. Having been brought together in Christ as a new holy race, reconciled to God, here’s how we should consider ourselves. **Vv.19-22...**

III. WE ARE BOUND TOGETHER IN CHRIST (2:19-22)

- A. Once we were people without a country. But now, instead of being foreigners, we are “fellow citizens with God’s people.” Citizenship in God’s kingdom tells us we are aliens to all other kingdoms, and that we are God’s gospel

ambassadors here. It means we are covered by God's great promises of blessing, and that we have our own homeland awaiting us, where there will be no more sorrow and we will be with the Lord forever.

Illus.: Years ago I read a wonderful chapter in the book, *On the Road with Charles Kurault*, about 87 people from 24 countries being sworn in as new citizens of the U.S on July 4th at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home in Virginia. "How do you feel?" one new citizen asked his wife afterward. "I feel reborn," she said. How much more those of us who, having once been foreigners and aliens, now find ourselves "*fellow citizens with the saints.*"

Reborn!

- B. Once we were friendless, like orphans living on the street. But now, instead of being *strangers* we are "*members of God's household.*" **In this picture we move from the courthouse to the home, from the public square to the kitchen table.** Here we see God, not as King, but as Father. Here we are not only citizens, but brothers and sisters with Jesus as our Elder Brother. Here we gather around a table. Here we talk of love and a wedding. Here we regale one another with stories of our Father's love and our Bridegroom's bravery, sacrifice and victory.

Illus.: I'm not sure if this story is true, but I heard about a Sunday School class whose teacher asked the kids how they felt about their church. Some said silly things to get the class to laugh. Some were more serious. There was one girl who was usually quiet, and who knows what experiences gave her this response, but she said that going to church was "*like walking into the heart of God.*" [#4216] **That is what the family of God should be like—walking into the heart of God.**

- C. Do you recognize these words in v.19? You should because you walk under them every time you enter this sanctuary. In thinking of our church as *home*, this verse in abbreviated form has become our theme verse. “*You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but... members of God’s household.*”
- D. Now Paul slides from one word picture into another, for believers are not only God’s household but also his house, so he shifts from talking about family to talking about building: v.20-21... The *whole building* of Christ’s people is vast, stretching over centuries and spanning the globe. According to **1 Pet.** we are all like living stones in that great sanctuary. But what holds us all together Christ’s unifying power and love. And what we have in common is that we are, together with all our brothers and sisters, the dwelling of the Lord himself, here on earth now and in the new heavens and earth forever. God will live among *us*, as his temple.
- E. *Illus.:* Years ago, when I was an Ass’t Pastor at the North Suburban Church in Deerfield, we started small groups—what we call Growth Groups here. I was casting about for a name and settled on 2:22 *Groups* because of this final verse: “*And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*” Just as this was true for the local church in Ephesus almost 2000 years ago, so it is true for us here. We “*are being built together.*”

Conclusion

I’m concerned that too many believers—some here, no doubt—think of their church life as secondary to their “personal walk with Jesus.” That’s wrong. Jesus did not only die on the cross to

forgive your sin and mine, but **to bring us together** as his kingdom citizens, as God's own household, his vast and beautiful temple.

Our place as Christians in this world depends on us being together. That's what Jesus has accomplished. He has made us *one new humanity—one new race*—different from all others in this world. To be Christ's church isn't simply a matter of 'coming to church' whenever we're in town. We must *be* his church—*together*. **The whole church—all of us together—preaches Christ.** Christians who have only loose ties to other believers give the church a kind of spiritual laryngitis; the world can't hear us.

What's more, we lose our own sense of God-given identity. You may be saved as a solitary believer but you surely can't be much of a Christian by yourself. **We're meant to be built together** to be God's dwelling. We're meant to be *one* Christian race. Without one another, it is difficult to know just who you are and where you fit in this world or the next.

Remember where we came from—far from God and walled off from those he'd chosen. **Remember** that Jesus died, not only to forgive our sin, but to bind us together as one new holy race. **Remember** who we are—*together*: kingdom citizens, the household of the Father, and the living temple of God.