

United to Jesus and One Another

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Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 00] If you are a regular attender here at St. Columbus, you know that we are working our way through Paul's letter to the Ephesians. And really the heartbeat of the letter is found in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 10, where we're told that the power of God has come into the world through the gospel, and that God, by the power of the gospel, is bringing everything together, even heaven and earth.

So through the power of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, God is bringing together all things that have been fractured in human history.

Ever since Genesis chapter 3, humanity has been fractured. Our relationships have been broken. Our alienation from God has been ever present. And the meaning of Ephesians is that God is bringing together all things through the power of the gospel, even heaven and earth.

Jesus, we looked at last week, is our peace, our shalom. And in the Old Testament, peace really does mean a recovery, bringing things together, making things right, bringing justice to the world.

A Fleming Rutledge is a writer in the U.S. and she wrote a really, really great book called *The Crucifixion*. And she's commenting here on verses 11 and 12, the beginning of the passage that we read.

[1 : 21] And she says this, by becoming sin, Jesus allied himself with our farthest extremity, perfectly summarized in the book of Ephesians. When Paul says, remember at that time, you were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Thus Jesus entered into our desperate condition. No wonder he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? God the Son put himself voluntarily and deliberately in the place of greatest accursedness and godlessness and he did it all for us.

And so that's the message of Ephesians. Jesus Christ brought peace into this world by becoming accursed for us. Now Ephesians two, two things that we've talked about.

One that if you're a Christian today, that means that you've experienced that power in your life. And that means that you've been saved by grace through faith, meaning that at some point God's grace came into your life, the gospel came into your life and it awakened your faith.

It's like, and many people have said this in the past, it's like the sleeping beauty story. Remember the sleeping beauty myth. She was asleep, but then the prince came and he kissed her on the cheek and she awoke.

[2 : 46] And that's exactly what happens in the gospel. Grace comes into your life and it kisses you and you wake up and when you wake up, you have faith, you believe, you see it, you become a Christian.

That's Ephesians two, one to 10. And then Ephesians two, 11 to 22 is that the first great example of God bringing things together in this world when the gospel enters into our life is he's now gathering a church, a place of peace, a community of peace.

So he brings peace between us and the Father and he brings peace between us and each other.

And so last week, we said that the greatest example of that, one of the great examples of that in the first century was the fact that Jews and Gentiles all of a sudden in a city like Ephesus came together and were not only tolerating each other, but were worshipping together and were actually friends with one another.

And this was the most unexpected thing. Jews and Gentiles have been so hostile to one another. Jews and Gentiles, Jews and Gentiles, everybody set against one another, fractured, not friends, not at peace.

And all of a sudden in the city of Ephesus, there is Jew and Gentile worshipping together, friends with one another, holding each other spiritually accountable, really relating to one another deeply. [4 : 01] And he's saying that when you realize that you can have peace with God by the cross, you then awaken to the fact that you can have peace with other people. And that's what the church is. The church is the gathering, the community of peace.

People who have been brought near to God and so have been brought near to one another. And so let's finish our reflections today on the church. Focus on verse 19 to 22, the end of this little section. And it's right here in verse 19, Paul gives you the outline. He says, what's the church? Who are you? Who is the church? He says, you are no longer aliens and strangers, but now you are citizens. So in other words, Paul is saying here two things to think about. One is who you were, apart from the gospel, and then who you've become. And that's the definition of the church, that we were once aliens and strangers and far away.

And we've really got to remember that if we want to know who we are. Who were we? And then who have we become? And he says you've become citizens, the household of God, and the holy temple.

[5 : 11] So who were we and who have we become? That's how Paul outlines it. Let's look at it that way. So first, who were we? And Paul says we were strangers, we were aliens, we were far off.

So in chapter two, verse one, and then chapter two, verse 11, there's a really clear parallel. Because Paul in verse one said, you were dead in your sins and trespasses.

And we said, when we looked at that, that dead people, if you were dead, spiritually dead, he's talking about, you cannot make yourself alive. You cannot resuscitate yourself. You cannot attach the defibrillator to yourself.

You're spiritually dead. And then he comes down in verse 11 and says, you, verse 11 and 12, and says, you were strangers, you were aliens to God. He goes so far as to say, you were without God and you were hopeless, without hope.

Now in the first instance, Paul identifies himself in that. He says, even us Jews, we were dead in sin. Then in the second instance, he says, now let me talk to the Gentiles.

[6 : 16] And he's saying, you were dead in sin, and that's most of us here, Gentiles. You were dead in sin and you were aliens, strangers to everything that God had revealed in world history.

The Christians that he's speaking with here, the Gentiles and Ephesus, they were pagans and they had been worshipping in the temple of Artemis. So the temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the world.

And in the temple of Artemis, in the heart of Ephesus, they were worshipping every single God imaginable but the real God. And he's saying, when you were there, when you were in that situation, you were without God, you were hopeless, you didn't know the real God.

You were a stranger. Now I don't know many of you better than me. We'll know the history of Scotland and the UK. But you know well that if you go back, as far as we know, that originally the Celtic Britons were here and the Gauls and the Picts and the Druids within the Picts and the Liskos on lots of different tribes.

And you go back and you look at and study every one of those, every single one of those people groups were polytheists. Every single one of them were worshipping all the gods in all sorts of different ways.

[7 : 33] And you go to Ephesus in the first century after the Celtic Britons had come to this land and they were polytheists and they were worshipping the gods in all sorts of ways.

And that's Paul is saying here in verse 12, you need to know, even if you can't remember, even if you live in the 21st century, you need to know your history that you really do come from, you really do come as people who are strangers to the Lord, strangers to God.

And until the gospel went from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth, all the way to this land Scotland, eventually we were far away. We didn't know God.

We didn't know about the covenant. It had never been revealed to us. I don't know. You've probably, you've had this experience I'm sure. Most of the people who live here travel a good bit. And when you travel, one of the things that happens is that you feel at some point like a stranger in a strange land. So you go somewhere and you don't speak the language.

[8 : 35] You don't know the customs. And sometimes for many of us, it's only at that point do we realize that we actually come from a culture. We assume most of us, if we've not traveled much,

that the culture we grew up in is not a culture at all.

It's just normal. Our culture is just what is. And everybody else has a culture. And then we go travel and we realize actually these people have a culture and I have a culture too.

Maybe we come from an individualist community here in modern Edinburgh. You've traveled to a communitarian culture, a culture that's full of honor and shame tradition.

And one of the things that happens is you get a, you sit down at the table and somebody puts a plate of food in front of you. And they say, eat. This is your, we made this for you, you need to eat. And you say, well, I'm on, I'm on whole 30 right now. I'm not eating bread at the moment. This is my intermittent fasting day. And I say, no, no, no, you don't understand.

[9 : 35] When you get food put on the table in front of you, you eat it in this culture. It would be very rude for you to say, well, this is the middle of my, this is about the 15th day of my whole 30.

And you realize there's culture shock in that moment. Probably a more common experience we've had is you, you go to New York City and you go to the bus stop and you, you get ready for the bus to come and you get into the queue and then you realize there is no queue.

Right. And you come back to Edinburgh and you say, society is unraveling there, you know. I can see the beginning of the breakdown.

Where you go in New York City to a restaurant and they bring you out, they bring the bill out to you after you eat and you realize in a moment, this is the fake bill. Right.

And the real bill is at least 18% more than this, maybe 25. These are moments of culture shock where we, we realize I have a culture and my culture is different from this culture.

[10 : 36] And I feel right now in different extremities, like I'm a stranger living in a strange land. And when you come back to your culture and you sometimes you realize that culture is actually a little better at this than my culture is.

That's reverse culture shock. Right. We call that reverse culture shock. Paul here is saying, every single one of us knows what it feels like to go somewhere and not feel like you belong, to feel like you're on the outside looking in.

And he's saying here to Jews and two, one to three and Gentiles, we are all before the Lord dead, not alive because of our trespasses and sins when it comes to our relationship with God.

And then he comes and he says, and we are all strangers, aliens, foreigners when it comes to our relationship with the God who made us. And he says, and that means that, you know, what, what is it?

How do you really know that you're a foreigner to a culture? You don't even think about that culture. You know, you don't even know it exists. You don't, it's something completely foreign to you. And for most people, quite often, apart from the gospel, apart from Christ, we don't even think about God.

[11 : 44] God is just a stranger. He made us, yet we don't know him. We're living in his world, yet we're like aliens. We're not really citizens of the world that he made, not really.

And Paul is saying here that when God comes into your life, he encounters you. The very first thing that has to happen is culture shock.

Christianity. It's, we make it, it feels normal to us if you've grown up in the church, but it's not.

Actually God comes into your life and it's culture shock. And you remember Isaiah six, when the Lord comes down, brings Isaiah up in a vision and he sees the holy, holy, holy God.

And Isaiah says, woe is me. I am unclean. I cannot stand. You know, he was an ultimate culture shock. He knew he realized in that moment, he was a stranger before the Lord.

He was an enemy of God that he needed to be cleansed. He needed to be renewed. He needed to be healed. And that means that the gospel came into the world and turned the world upside down.

[12 : 46] In Acts chapter 17 verse six, Paul and Silas were preaching in Greece, what we, what we now call Greece. And they preached the gospel and one of the citizens of the city came and said, these, these men have turned our city upside down.

The gospel has just corrupted everything that we stood for here. And when the God, when you really see the encounter of God in your life and the experience of grace in your life, you realize that the normal order of the world is some combination of pursuing power by way of wealth, prestige and indulgence of every desire, some combination, every culture in some way, shape or form.

And the gospel comes and says, the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve. The Son of man came to give his life away as a ransom for many, not to seek power, but to give it up.

That the first will be last and the last will be first. And you realize that the gospel came into the world and it is not normal. It's not normal. And so you see what, here's what Paul is saying in verses 11 to 22 verse 11, he says, remember, and that is the only command given in the first three chapters. There's no other imperatives in the first three chapters. So this is the only time he tells you to do something. And what he calls every single one of us to do today is remember, remember what? [14:12] It could be that you're coming today as a Christian and he's talking to Christians here and you are feeling disinterested, bored, frustrated by the message of Christianity and by the community of the church.

And your heart is not soft to these things, but hard to these things. And Paul's command is it could be that you don't really remember in your life right now that you were a stranger to God, that you were dead in sins and trespasses, that you were lost, that you were a foreigner, that you were far away from the Lord.

If you've grown up in the church, it feels normal to be around Christianity. And Paul's trying to say, you've got to remember, think, use your historic memory to look back beyond this temporary moment and say, I was lost, I was a stranger, I was dead in my sins and trespasses and God came and found me and saved me.

And that memory, Paul is saying, might be the breakthrough today that you need to find renewal in loving God and loving his people as well.

Who were you? You were a stranger. You were dead. But God brought you near by the blood of the cross. Jesus Christ became an alien to the Father.

[15:41] He became the stranger. He became the enemy of God at the cross so that we might be brought near. Now, secondly, and the main idea today, that's who we were now, Paul's focus in 19 to 22 is who are we now?

Who is the church now? And you can see in verse 15, he says, by the blood of the cross, Jesus created in himself one new man in the place of two and made peace.

So he says, we are the church now is a new humanity, a new people, one new body made up of many nations, many people groups from all of human history.

And then in verse 19 to 22, he gives you three images. He says in verse 19, you are fellow citizens in God's kingdom.

You are the household of God and you are the temple. All right, so three images, three metaphors for who the church is, who we are today. And if there's one thing to think about as we think about these three things very briefly, is Paul is saying, look, I'm going to tell you who you are.

[16:48] I'm going to tell you who you are. And now I'm going to tell you, you've got to become who you are more and more and more. So this is who you are. And so our goal, our hope is to become that more and more. And so the first thing he tells us here is that we are citizens.

The church is the citizenship of God's kingdom. What's a citizen? A citizen in the first century, Greco-Roman Empire, is that you are a person who's under Caesar the king.

You have rights before Caesar and you can own property, you can own land. And that's very similar to the way we think about citizenship now in the Old Testament, citizenship was God saying, I will be your God, you will be my people, and we will dwell together in the land forever.

And so Paul says the first thing is that church, the church, the gathering of Christians, if you've experienced grace in your life, you really are in God's sight, his citizenship, the citizenship of the kingdom that God is building in world history.

Now Peter puts it like this. He says you church, the church of Jesus is the holy nation. The church is a holy nation, a nation.

[17:58] All right, what does it mean? It means first that the church is the citizenship of God and that that is our fundamental identity.

In other words, Paul is saying if you are a Christian today, the church, the family of God, the citizenship of God is who you really are at the very bottom. It is foundational.

We are citizens of the household of God before, we said this last week, before we're American, before we're German, before we're Scottish, English, Welsh, Irish.

He says the very first marker of the Christian identity is you are the gathered body of Jesus, the citizenship of the kingdom, before anything else. And then he says that means that you now have a citizenship in this kingdom, you have a place to belong.

You can never lose your citizenship. You have rights with God, you have rights before the Father. You are connected to each other as true neighbors no matter how you feel about it, no matter how we feel about it.

[19 : 00] And so he says here that in the midst of a Western individualist culture where autonomy, choice, individuality all come at the cost of belonging that we really are, we belong together.

We're citizens. And it can't be taken away. It's who we are. And that means that as one writer puts it, when he calls us here a holy nation, a citizenship, one writer says it like this, the church is God's holy nation that exists to worship and proclaim the Lord.

One that operates with righteousness and justice, where the prosperous share with the poor, where the powerful protect the weak. And where individuals work for the common good, where we are more passionate about corporate flourishing than selfish gain.

This is a place where the inhabitants don't only consider their own interest, but decide never to put a stumbling block and to pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding together.

This is a place of overflowing truth, grace and love. A holy nation. People set apart a citizenship.

Now the final two, not only a citizenship, but also a household, a family and a holy temple.

[20 : 16] One of the things you see here is that the metaphors are intensifying. So they're gaining momentum. And when you come to the second one, he says that we are the church, this gathering, this people is a household, a family as well.

So that's the second thing. Here's the intensity. He says, it's good to be a citizen of a nation. It's great to be a citizen of the United Kingdom. I hope to be one day.

But it's even better to have a family, to be in a household. So citizenship is one thing. And citizenship is really good. It comes with benefits. It comes with rights.

It comes with access to the King, to God himself. But then he says, but you're also a household and a family of faith.

And so he's intensifying the metaphors and he's taking it up a step. And he says in verse 16, you really have been reconciled that God is one body. You know, when you're a citizen in a country, you have neighbors.

[21 : 20] You all have neighbors. And you might like your neighbors. You might not like your neighbors. But at the end of the day, you can go home and you can shut your door and you can lock it and you don't have to interact with your neighbors.

And so that's why I think he now says, but you are also a household. And when you're in a household, you're actually sharing the same space and you're living together.

There's nothing that helps you get to know somebody else as quickly as staying with them. And when you stay with somebody, when you live in the same house as somebody, you cut through the superficiality very quickly.

And you break through and you really get to know what is it that annoys them? What is it that's bothering them? What is it that brings them joy? Because you're sharing the same, that same space. And so Paul comes along here and says, look, you're citizens.

You have rights before God. Jesus Christ has given you that. You have access. That can't be taken away from you. You have neighbors in the family of God and it will always be that way. You are the citizenship of the kingdom that is to come.

[22 : 23] And you've got to live in the same space together. In other words, I think what he's saying here with the intensity of the second metaphor is that he's calling us not only to say, I am part of the church, but I am a person.

We are people who really do seek to know each other all the way to the point of deep spiritual accountability. This might be the breakthrough.

Are you coming today disinterested, bored, struggling to have a fresh, soft heart to the things of God? One of the things that you may really need in your life right now, and this could be the game changer in your spiritual life, is Paul is saying, do you have real, living, deep, vibrant spiritual accountability with a person that knows you very well?

With a person, a Christian friend in the household, the community of faith that knows you, that knows what you struggle with, that knows your sins, that you're able to talk to honestly and openly. Do you have that?

That's deep abiding Christian friendship and that's the product of being a part of the household of faith, the community of faith. The community of faith is family, he's saying, and so there's got to be

that person in your life.

[23 : 35] It may be the case that we all need today to break through the individualist culture that we're a part of and realize that it is very, very biblical to get together with somebody, a dear Christian friend, and to talk about the spiritual life, and to talk about the struggles, and to talk about the Bible, and to ask for prayer, and to really walk hand in hand with another person that is a believer that's in your community of faith.

Do you have that? Are you seeking that? That's the household of faith, that's the family of faith. It's real deep abiding spiritual accountability. And I think it's something that every church community desperately needs, but it's not really something that can ever be programmed.

We St. Columbus as an institution can't start a program for Christian friendship. It has to be something that we pursue, that we get serious about, that we walk alongside each other.

The third and final thing that he tells us here is that the intensity of the metaphors that keep going, it's not only that we're citizens of the kingdom, that we're members of the family, that we actually have to dwell close with one another and know each other, but the very last one he says to us is that we're a holy temple.

He puts it in lots of different ways here. He says you are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. So the first thing he says is, if you're a Christian today, saved by grace through faith, you are now part of a building, you're built.

[25 : 02] Every single Christian transformed by the gospel is a brick in the temple that God is building. So you're a brick in God's temple. And then he tells us that brick, you, have been placed into relationship with the cornerstone.

And the cornerstone is the most foundational piece, the most foundational brick that you have to align perfectly. Jesus Christ himself, that everything else is connected to and built upon.

And he says, when you take the cornerstone, God attached to the cornerstone a foundation stone, lots of little bricks that form the foundation that are the apostles and prophets.

When you think about that all that together, he's saying, what is the church? He's saying, do you realize the church is Catholic? It's small sea Catholic.

It's universal, built on the foundation of the first century prophets and apostles. And he's saying, in every little brick that's been attached to it over century and century and century, in every nation among every people is part of that temple and you're part of it.

[26 : 07] And so he's saying, do you have a big vision, a big Catholic vision, true Catholicity, not Roman Catholic, no, not at all, but truly Catholic.

A vision that you are deeply connected to the foundation of the apostles and the prophets and the fathers and the mothers of the church that have come in the first century and second century and third century and the brothers and sisters across every tribe tongue and language across all of human history that that is your body, that is the temple that you're a part of.

It's a Catholic vision for the church. And then he says, you're a brick and you're cemented to the cornerstone, you're connected and that means that you're a brick that is also cemented to one another.

So God has taken concrete, cement and slabbed it onto all of us and connected us all with each other. And he's saying, in other words, saying, you don't get to have a casual relationship with the church because you've actually been cemented to it.

You really are. You really are part of the body of Christ if you're a Christian. And so he's saying, the calling now is to be active and grow up more and more in being who you are.

[27 : 18] You're cemented to the cornerstone and you're cemented to all the other bricks, but are you living that out? Is that the way you feel about it? Is that the way you think about it? Is that your will and desire in your life to be cemented to all the other bricks that God has connected you to in the body of Christ?

The very last thing is he says, you, in other words, this building, these bricks all connected to one another, you are the temple of the living God. And that means that he's calling us at the very end here to say, who is the church?

The church has to have something like a corporate spirituality, meaning God loves to indwell us when we're together.

And so I think he's calling us to get past our Western materialistic practical, practical unbelief and realize that when the church gathers together on a Sunday right now, God says, I love to come and

indwell this space.

This is the temple, the gathering, the bricks all connected to one another. God really is present, that's what he's saying. And we're about to experience that to its climax, to its pinnacle when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, that the Lord really does come down and is present, Christ by the Spirit, when we gather together and we celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

[28 : 45] We'll close with this. It could be, it very well may be today that you say you think you feel. I hear that the church is the citizenship of God, I hear that the church is the family and that we're meant to be close and knit to one another.

I hear Paul say that we really are the bricks of God gathered together as the temple, indwelled by the Spirit. I see that Paul says all that.

I don't feel that way. I don't actually feel that here. I don't feel that in my experiences in the church throughout all the century, throughout all my decades.

I feel lonely in the church. I don't feel like I have a deep Christian friend to walk alongside me. I feel like I'm part of an institution, not a family sometimes.

And there's lots of things to say about that, but just let me give you two practical steps as we come to the Lord's Table. Remember that he says remember.

[29 : 51] He says remember. It's the only command in the first three chapters. So as we come to the Lord's Table this morning, he says, look, maybe the thing that you've got to do in this moment as we begin to pray and enter into this time of communion is to remember once again, let me say the same thing again.

I and we were aliens, strangers, far away from God, hopeless, without God in the world, dead in sins and trespasses, deserving every justice that is demanded of us, but God brought me near. And Paul says simply as you come to the Lord's Table today, the activity that you can take up is just to remember and say, I was lost. I was asleep. I was dead. And God found me.

And when you re-experience that and you wake back up to the beauty and the greatness of the gospel, of who you really were and who God has made you, you'll start to feel again the connection you have with every other person that's experienced that.

And so secondly, and finally, Paul is simply telling us here, be who you are this morning. Embrace it all the more. He's saying that when it comes to the gospel, you do nothing.

[31 : 03] When it comes to forgiveness, God does everything. But when it comes to being part of the church family, there really is an active role that has to be taken up. There's a decision that has to be made.

There's a moment where you have to say, I'm going to get beyond my feelings and pursue the body of Christ and be one of the bricks that's cemented to the other bricks.

Another way to say it, the last way to say it, you'll never be connected as deeply as you possibly can to other people in the community of faith if you're not finding yourself reconnecting to Christ the cornerstone every single day.

You can only be a holy temple really growing together, a family really growing together if you're regularly saying, I have a true elder brother. If you're regularly reconnecting with the cornerstone himself and being able to say, now I can look around and say, this is my brother.

This is my sister. You know, if you're a Christian today, there are people in this room that you don't, I know many people in this room, you don't know each other.

[32 : 11] You're sitting here and you say, I don't actually know maybe half the people in this room right now. Some of you, it's 90%, you don't know, some of you, it's 10%, you don't know, but it's all different measures.

But the reality of what Paul is saying to us is that there could be a person in this room sitting across the room that comes from an utterly different culture than you, has completely different interests than you, is a person you probably wouldn't have connected with in normal course of life.

But because they are a believer, you are knit together and closer with them forever than you are with a pal, with a friend that you grew up with that has every interest that you have, but that's not a Christian.

You are actually that tight with them in reality because you together are the living body of Jesus Christ, the true elder brother. Let us pray.

Father, we ask that you would break through now and give us a sense, a longing, a desire, an awakening to the greatness of the gospel, the peace that you've brought into our lives.

[33 : 15] And then alongside that, Lord, help us, help us, Lord, to love one another, we ask. So thank you, Jesus, that you've connected us to yourself and connected us to one another.

And today we just ask that our feelings would follow reality. So help us, Lord, now to let our feelings and our desires catch up to the truth of who we are.

So as we come to the Lord's table and prepare for that, oh, Lord, would you condescend, would you be present, would you come and meet with us, would we break through our modernism and forget and not forget today that the spiritual life is more real, is as real as the physical, that we would know you truly are present with us by the Holy Spirit as we commune with you.

And we pray for this heart. We pray for these hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.