

**God's New Community**  
**God's New Community on Earth**  
**Ephesians chapter 2:11-22**  
**October 24<sup>th</sup> 2021**  
**Preacher – Pastor Roy Summers**

**Have you ever felt like an outsider?**

I wonder if you have ever felt like an outsider? Whenever my school friends played football on the playground at lunchtimes they would appoint two of the lads to choose teams. And I would always be the last to be chosen! I felt an outsider to the world of football!

You will have your own stories, no doubt, because alienation in a fallen world is an all too common experience.

When the New Testament church began, it was mainly made up of Jewish Christians. When Gentiles began to be saved (a Gentile is anyone who is not a Jew), it was easy for them to feel like outsiders for two main reasons. First, weren't the Jews God's people, his natural family, his chosen nation, stretching back some 2000 years to Abraham and his descendants, especially the twelve sons of Jacob, who became the 12 tribes of Israel? Wasn't it to the Jews God gave promises and spoke through his prophets? And wasn't it God who done this? He had chosen just one nation?

Second, the differences in lifestyle between Jew and Gentile were so great! Jews followed strict rules about what they could and could not eat, who they could and could not marry, what they could and not wear, about sacrifices and religious feasts spread out right across over the year. Male Jews even bore a mark in their bodies to signify the difference between Jew and Gentile, circumcision.

What is more these differences, Jew and Gentile, led to bitter hatred!

Jews despised Gentiles and regarded them as dirty and unclean! If a Jewish Rabbi accidentally brushed against a Gentile in the market place he might go home and wash and change his clothes. Jews called Gentiles "dogs" and the derogatory term "uncircumcised." Gentiles, mind you, gave as good as they got, and history is littered, even to this present day, with the fallout of anti-Semitism. Someone has said that in all the history of the world, there has never been a greater divide than between Jew and Gentile!

But the story of the Gospel, is not only the story of individuals getting right with God, (that's Ephesians 2:1-10) it's also the story of God making one new humanity out of two once-hostile communities, Jew and Gentile, (Ephesians 2:11-22.) and doing all of this through the death of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Acts how through a dream the apostle Peter was given by God, and through the many Gentiles coming to Christ, the Jewish mother church in Jerusalem had to realise that this was God's great plan, to bring Jew and Gentile into the one community. In Acts 15

we read about a conference where Jewish Christians finally recognised that Gentile Christians were to be welcomed into the church. All of this is the background to Ephesians 2:11-22:

Some believer is thinking, understandably, “What has any of this got to do with me today? I know very few Jewish folks and I have never met a Jewish Christian!” “And over the centuries the church of Jesus Christ has become mainly Gentile—and that was always God’s plan when he called Abraham, he said to him (Genesis 12:3), “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” ,so how does this relate to me today? I’m a Gentile Christian but I don’t feel the alienation of these first Gentile Christians!”

Well, let’s make our way through the teaching in these verses and then we will see how profoundly relevant these verses are to us today (as God’s word always is!)

### **(1) What we once were—outsiders**

*Verse 11 “Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and are called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” that done in the body by the hands of men—[why does Paul say “by the hands of men”? Because circumcision was meant to be the outward sign of heart changed by God, and where there was no changed heart, circumcision was a meaningless human-only sign] - remember that at one time...”*

And now Paul goes on to list five ways in which all Gentiles including you and me were outsiders:

- 1) We were separated from God’s Messiah, *“Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ.”* (verses 12) All those many wonderful promises in the OT about a coming Messiah, Saviour King, were unknown to us because we did not have the Scriptures.
- 2) We were excluded from God’s nation, *“excluded from citizenship in Israel.”* (verse 12) If a Gentile came to live among the Jews he was regarded as an alien, and even if you became a Jewish convert they were not allowed to get as close to the temple, where God dwelt, as Jewish believers. There was an enormous courtyard around the temple for the Gentiles, but walled off from the temple with signs posted at regular intervals in Gentile languages: *“No man of another race is to enter within the fence and enclosure around the Temple. Whoever is caught will have only himself to blame for the death that follows.”*
- 3) We had no relationship with God. *“You were foreigners to the covenants of the promise”* (verse 12) God had made many agreements, covenants with Abraham and his descendants, but these promises were not made to the Gentiles!
- 4) We were without hope. *“you were without hope”* verse 12. Jews were looking forward to the coming Messiah. It’s the same today, people around us have no future hope, no personal hope in the face of death and no global hope in the face of climate change and global warming. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned a couple months ago, that the earth was in

*“imminent and dire risk.”*

The Gentile world, both then and now, lived without hope! The Jews always had a bright vision of a future age when the Messiah would come and reign over the whole earth in peace. And finally....

5) We were without God. *“Without God”* (verse 12) Israelites lived every day of their lives in the certain knowledge of a God who created the Universe, but Gentiles worshipped dead idols, rather than the one and only true living God from whom they were separated by their sins.

In summary, we Gentiles were lost!

## **(2) What God has done**

*Verse 13, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”* Gentiles who were outsiders, have been brought in from the cold, and it has all happened through Jesus Christ and especially through his suffering and death.

You know all those endless civil and ceremonial laws, which separated Jews from Gentiles: what to eat, wear, what to sacrifice and when? The dividing wall between the Gentiles and Jews in the temple was a symbol of these massive differences; well Jesus Christ fulfilled and abolished all those laws;

*Verse 14 “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two (Jew and gentile) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.”*

*Verse 15: “His purpose was to create in himself one new man, or humanity, out of the two (Jew and Gentile) thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to those who were far away (through the apostles Jesus preached peace to gentiles) and peace to those who were near (the apostles preached the Gospel to the Jews). For through him we both (Jew and Gentile) have accesses to the Father by one Spirit.” (There is no longer a preferential access to God for the Jews, both have access to God, both can pray to God directly through Jesus and by the one Spirit he has poured out on all who believe.)*

So now, Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ!

Gentiles (as well as Jews) are citizens of God’s new Nation! *“Consequently you (Gentiles) are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God’s people.”* (v. 19). This new nation is no longer a geographically located nation-state like China or India, but spread out all over the world!

Gentiles (as well as Jews) belong to God’s new Family! *“Members of God’s household”* (19)

And Gentiles (as well as Jews) are part of God’s new Building! *“Built on the foundation of the*

*apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”*

Imagine a great building like the cathedral in Barcelona called Sagrada Familia—still under construction I believe! The church is like a great building, made up of Jewish stones and Gentile stones, with the apostles of the NT and the prophets of the OT as the foundation stones, with Jesus Christ as the chief corner stone, which all the other stones line up with. Moreover, who lives in this great new building? Who lived in the temple? God did! Who lives in the temple of people made of living stones? God does, by his Spirit.

In summary, we Gentile believers were outsiders, Jews, who could trace their genealogy back to Abraham were insiders. A mighty wall of laws and regulations and privileges divided Jew from Gentile—and often led to hostility! But through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, the wall has been broken down and we Gentiles have been brought into the same privileges as the Jews, we are now part of God’s people, his family, his building!

### **(3) So how should we respond?**

*(1) Gentile Christians: Let’s remember what God has done for us in Christ!*

Twice Paul says “remember” (11) “remember” (12) We Gentiles were total outsiders whom God by his grace has brought in from the cold! In Romans chapter 11 Paul likens Jewish Christians to the root and trunk of the original tree and we Gentile Christians are like the branches that God has grafted onto the trunk! Let us always remember with gratitude and thanksgiving how God has brought us into his family from the cold.

*(2) Gentiles and Jews are now one in Christ*

If you were ever to meet a Jewish Christian, and it must be wonderful to be a Jewish Christian and to meet one, remember that they had to come to God through Jesus Christ in exactly the same way as you did. So that you are both now equal in Christ. Some years ago there was a storm brewing in the Whitehouse. It turned out that big donors to the president’s political party had privileged access to the president and could even stay for a few days in the Whitehouse!

Well, no-one has privileged access to God anymore! If that was true of the Jew before the coming of Christ, it is no longer the case, “*For through Jesus”* verse 18, “*we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*”

These two truths we Gentiles should all bear in mind, that God has brought us Gentiles out of the cold into his family, and that through the death of Jesus Christ, that Jew and Gentile are now one, but there is more.

*(3) All believers: Let’s remember that salvation means belonging to a new community*

In 2:1-10, Paul was explaining the blessing of individual salvation, how each one of us one by one is

reconciled to God by grace. But in 2:11-22 Paul wants us to take note of the corporate dimension of salvation—we are saved to belong to a great kingdom, to a new family, to a new building!

There is no such thing in the NT as a lone Christian! Someone who is saved by God but then is all alone! If we were to meet someone who said to us “I’m a follower of Jesus but I don’t belong to a group of Christians” a church, we’d have to say to them, “You are very mistaken my friend for the NT knows nothing of the lone Christian.”

In the 1700s two great evangelists George Whitfield and John Wesley went up and down the country preaching the Gospel. But while Wesley gathered the young converts into small groups which met every week—much like our home groups, Whitfield didn’t. And Wesley gently chastised Whitfield, “to evangelise and not gather into a community is to beget children for the murderer” chided Wesley. Christians need one another!

We have come through a strange 18 months and we do not know what the future holds. What we do know is that God’s people must be in fellowship with one another. We must continue to meet with one another, we must continue to love one another, we must continue to pray for one another. We must continue to make the church a very high priority in our weekly schedules and lives. God knows that we need one another. How high up the list of your and my weekly priorities is the church family?

#### *(4) Believers are one: let nothing divide us!*

And finally, if God has brought two communities together who were formerly in total hostility, let us make sure that in the church of Jesus Christ, nothing is allowed to divide us! Satan is a cunning enemy! Always seeking to destroy the church. Perhaps through persecution, fear, intimidation. Perhaps through false doctrine, leading some astray. Perhaps through party spirit, “I’m for Apollos” “I’m for Paul.” Perhaps through wolves who scatter the flock with slander. And sometimes through division the one believer from another!

Do you sometimes look around you at MPC and think, “I’m so different from her, or he’s so different from me? I don’t fit here because of age or class or nationality or marital status, whatever.” Listen! If God could bring Jew and Gentile with their vast differences together through Christ, he can bring you and that person, this group and that group together into one church where *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:28)

Believers are one in Christ: let nothing divide us!

Do you belong to this glorious community—it’s the only community that will outlast the years. Well you are welcome into God’s family if you receive Jesus Christ and believe in him for we read: “to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12)