

“The Church” // Ephesians 2:11–3:10 //

Love Incorruptible # 4

Ephesians 2:11–3:10

Paul has **spent the last chapter and a half talking about the gospel**; now he turns his attention to the body of people that the gospel creates—the church.

The passage we are going to look at today is **extremely relevant to us**, I think, for two reasons.

First, sociologists who study spirituality in America say that two seemingly contradictory things are true in regards to Americans’ spiritual lives: FIRST: spiritual interest is at an all-time high in our country—people are really religiously hungry, BUT, at the same time, there is a decided move away from institutional religion.

- **81% of Americans** answered ‘yes’ to this question: “Do you believe you can be a very good Christian w/o attending a church?”
- **Paul gets into that in these verses.**

The **2nd reason** this passage is so relevant for us is that in it Paul gives a **prescription for racial and cultural unity** in the church.

- **Racial strife in Paul’s churches was a real issue** because for the first couple of thousand years, God’s people had all been Jews, and **then Jesus shows up with his new “whosoever will” program**, and a bunch of Gentiles believe, too, and **so now**—in these new churches—you’ve got Gentiles sitting next to Jews, and

Works Consulted:

“Ephesians 2:11-22,” Tim Keller

“Foretaste of the Future,” Tim Keller

“Bloodlines to Bloodline,” John Piper

“Therefore...” Albert Tate

“Tearing Down the Dividing Wall,” HB Charles

Gentiles had their own Gentile customs and fashions, and Gentile music preferences, and Gentile political viewpoints.

- And so, it was a mess.

2000 years later, and It’s still a mess. **Many people in our day love the concept of a multi-cultural society**, but achieving that has proven quite difficult.

- I read an article not too long ago in *The Atlantic*: Even people who live in progressive, multicultural neighborhoods end up hanging out only with people just like them.
 - Progressive colleges: **Basketball guys gravitate toward those like him**
- **Many people who love the idea of a multi-cultural church** are fine with it until you start doing things that are culturally uncomfortable to them.
- **I confess that I am like this** sometimes. *I love the concept* but living in the reality can be quite difficult.
- **And could we be real for just a minute? Based on your Facebook feed**, some of you are all about racial reconciliation but you don’t really do anything about it.
 - You are what one of our pastors calls a **“slactivist.”** You champion things on Facebook you don’t live out in real life.

This passage not only shows us the importance of cultural and racial diversity in the church, it shows us how to achieve it—how to **move beyond virtue signaling and slactivism**.

- Now, I want to be clear, please don’t hear this as me saying we are anywhere close to having this figured out. This passage has a lot to teach us.

So, here's what we're going to do. We're first just going to **work our way through the passage—because I just love doing that**—and then we're going to answer a couple of questions:

- **First**, why we should be deeply committed to the local church.
- **Second**, how unity can be achieved within the church.

Paul says, ^{2:11} Therefore remember that at one time you were Gentiles... ('Gentiles' just meant "non-Jews." And many, if not most, of these Ephesian Christians were Gentiles) ¹² separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. (See how it says, back to back, *in parallel*, "separated from Christ, alienated from Israel"? That's because they were one and the same. If you wanted to belong to God, you had to also belong to Israel. If you wanted to know God, you had to become Jewish. Think **Rahab or Ruth** in the OT.)

You, he says to these **Ephesian Gentile Christians**, were **once in this category (v. 12)** ...foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.

¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...

Literally, around the Jewish Temple was a literal wall, about 10-foot high, made of thick stone, with a sign on it that read, and I quote: 'ANY GENTILE ENTERING BEYOND THIS WALL WILL HAVE ONLY HIMSELF TO BLAME FOR HIS ENSUING DEATH.' They clearly hadn't mastered the concept of the seeker service.

- This wall separated, in the Jewish mind, the good from the bad, the clean from the unclean, the safe from the unsafe.

Now, let's stop here and acknowledge that we may be politically correct enough to not post signs like that anymore, but we still have

"walls" in our mind that separate the right kinds of people from the wrong ones. The good from the bad; the safe from the unsafe.

- Maybe they are racial: White, black, Hispanic, Asian.
- But they could also exist because of...
 - Education levels: maybe you only feel comfortable being around people who have a similar education level to you (or maybe you don't like people who are educated because you think they are untrustworthy)
 - Could be a wall in your mind separating the successful from the unsuccessful—those who have what it takes and those who don't, and you spend your time only with the successful.
 - A wall between the good looking, popular people and the nerds
 - Political walls—you think people with one political philosophy are all most good, others can't help but be bad
 - Those from good families versus those with messed up ones
 - **Whatever!**

Who is that you feel a natural kinship or bond with, and whom do you think of as "other": outsiders, foreign, unlike you, unsafe, even potential enemies?

Just ask yourself: What is about someone that makes you meet them and immediately you sort of relax and say, "Ahh... these are my people." **Who IS your "people," your "tribe"?**

- Is it primarily those who share the same skin color as you?
- Those who make about as much as you?
 - (I know some **rich people that just feel tense** when they are with people of modest income. And *vice versa*.)
- Or maybe those who share your core political leanings? You find out someone is a Republican and you are like, "Oh, ok." Or you find out that they **hate Republicans** and you think, "Oh, ok, we can be friends."

There's **nothing wrong with these natural affinities**, of course, but they end up erecting walls that put divisions within the church.

Christ tore down all those dividing walls, Paul said. In Christ, there is **only one category of people**: sinners.

- When it came to God, we were all on the **outside**.
- *There were no "good people" or "bad people"; "winners or losers"; "people who have it together" or "dysfunctional people"; there's only bad, dead, sin-sick rebels, children of Satan, sons and daughters of disobedience, without God and without hope in this world.*
- **And Jesus' blood, Paul says** (vs. 14) has cleansed us all alike.

That tore down the wall!

- *BTW, think of how revolutionary this was!* At the **time Paul wrote these words**, the 10-foot wall in the Temple was still there. It had been constructed by the command of God. Paul says, *"That wall no longer exists."*
- Before God, the wall was gone, even if it remained physically.
- Before God, all of our distinctions are gone, too, even if they still exist in society.

Furthermore, vs. 15, Paul says that Jesus' resurrection created a whole new race of humanity that every person who belongs to him now shares: In his flesh, 15 he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations (those couldn't bring salvation or resurrection), so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace.

- **Christ was not raised**, Paul said, as a Jew, or a Gentile. He was raised as a completely new man, so that he could create a whole new race of people.
- **This creation of this one new kind of man** resulted in peace, because in his death and resurrection Christ has removed anything which would have made us feel superior to others and

made relatively insignificant everything that distinguishes us from one another—giving us something glorious in common that far exceeds our differences.

- **In Jesus**, there's only one **kind of sinner: dead**; only **one type of believer**: alive in Christ, fully adopted into God's family, partakers of God's glorious inheritance. **The end. Hallelujah. Amen somebody.**

(18–22) ¹⁸For through him, we both have access in *one Spirit* to the *Father*. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of *God's* household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with *Christ Jesus* himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you are also being built together for *God's* dwelling in the *Spirit*.

(BTW, here we have the **whole Trinity** involved again. **When it comes to the church**, the Father is the architect; his Son is the foundation; the Spirit is the builder.)

Now, Paul then goes on in the beginning of chapter 3 (which we won't read) to talk about how pointing toward this unified, multi-cultural body of people was one of his specific life callings—

And then he ends with this *amazing* statement: **3:10** This (this unified church, one in Christ) is so that God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens. *How* will they know? **Bill Hybels** story: "You are looking at it too narrowly: the evangelistic effectiveness of a unified body of Christ would be greater than having a numbers surge in any one location."

- Very formative for how I approached church...

A couple of action items for you out of this passage:

I. You should be very involved in the church

- The church, Paul tells us, is **what** God is building on earth.
- And as I showed you, *literally every member of the Trinity is involved in it.* If every member of the Trinity is involved, you really think it is optional for you?
- **Each member of the church, Paul says, is a key part of this building**—each us is a **precious stone**; not a brick, where everybody is the same—but a precious stone where we are all unique, placed in this building.
- God **places the gifts his Spirit** into each of us to do his work on earth.

This is a concept that should forever change how you see church: The place where the spirit of God has chosen to reside is in the church. It's how you experience his presence and his power. He has put his gifts in every member—not just me.

- **In other place Paul uses the analogy of the body**, with Jesus is the head. One of my fav's, because it so clear: The head accomplishes its purposes via the members of its body. When my brain, for examples, receives a message from my left elbow that it itches, it doesn't send down magic "brain power juice" to fix it. Instead, it sends a message to the fingers on my right hand, "Go take care of your brother left elbow."
- **In the same way, when we pray, God doesn't usually "zap"** power straight down from heaven to accomplish his will. He moves a member of his body to do the work, through the means of spiritual gifts.

That means if you disconnect yourself from the church, you are disconnecting yourself from the power of God.

Thus, when people ask, "How much should I be involved in the church?" My **answer:** to the extent that you want God to work in your life.

- In fact, I'd be so bold to say that you have no right to ask for the help of God if you intentionally separate yourself the means of that help.
- "God, I need direction in my life." God says, "Ahh... that wisdom is **from the Spirit**, and this Spirit is housed in the body of people known as the church."
- "God, I need help in my marriage." Again, in my church.
- "God, I am lonely." God says, "Go to church."
- "God, I don't understand you." Go to church!
- **If you want God to work in your life, you have to be part of the church.**

You see, sitting on the sidelines of the church, even if you were hearing the best sermons in the world, means that you're experiencing only a small fraction of what God wants you to know. You have to be involved. VERY involved.

This church has a bad problem with what we call "**ninja**" Christians." You slip in and out **unnoticed**. Sit on the aisles. When I bow for prayer, you slip out. You never get to know anyone, you are not really involved in anything.

- **Ninjas are cool—but they make bad church members.**
- (And yes, I see you...)
- ~~To go back to the **building analogy**, you are like the ugly pile of bricks beside a house that looks like they were going to build something with it, but never did, and now it's just this big, ugly heap. That's what some of you are.~~

Join. Get involved. There can be no sideline Christians.

II. The Summit should be known for its unity in diversity

- **I want to just thank God for a minute and celebrate something.** God has brought us such a long way on this.

- They say that a truly multicultural church is one with no more than 80% of its people have one race.
 - **That number is not arbitrary**, btw, because 20% is when they say minorities start to feel like their voice is heard, their influence is felt and first time guests who are minorities don't feel out of place.
- **Last year we were at 19%**, which is up dramatically from even 5 years ago, when we would have been about 5%.
- **So, praise God.** But we still have a good way to go, and a lot to learn.

What I want to re-emphasize today is that one of the best ways we can demonstrate the wisdom and power of God is being known for our unity-in-diversity.

((Ephesians 3:10 This is so that God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens.))

It's how we display the multi-faceted wisdom of God to the world.

I've told you: A group of people all sharing one culture getting together is not miraculous—that happens at **any football game, rock concert, or political rally.**

But when you have a group of people who have little in common except for a common experience of grace—that points to the **magnitude of the gospel and the power of the new man created by the resurrection.**

The world **should look at us and ask**, “Why do these people love each other?”

- I've often used the example with you of **Simon the Zealot** and **Matthew the Tax Collector**... spicy conversations around the campfire. **Later: Nicodemus/the Samaritan woman at the**

well/woman caught in adultery. But people wondered, “Why do these guys love each other so much?”

This kind of unity is hard, and it takes commitment. Let me give you a handful of reasons it is hard:

First of all, **A. Satan.**

- Satan **hates this kind of unity**, especially in the church. This is how God gets glory, and he wants to obscure it.
- At its core, this is a spiritual battle, and we should **ALWAYS** be aware he's working in us to try and undo it.

B. Pride

- **Racial, political, and educational characteristics tend to become core parts of our identity; they are what sets us apart from others and make us significant.** And so, we **feel proud** about them, and we resist anything that threatens to remove that distinction.
- ~~**Again, let me get you to consider:** What makes up your core identity? What defines you?~~
 - I'm Hispanic. White. I'm black.
 - I went to this school.
 - I'm rich.
 - A Ph.D.
 - I ran a marathon. (It's been a while since I have complained about that one. What other thing are you socially allowed to brag about—putting the accomplishment on the back of your car? 26.2. Can people with IQ (140); 100K?)
- **Pride grows out of defining yourself primarily** by things about you that set you apart from others.
- **Nothing wrong, of course, with any of those things: but where pride in them exists, there will be no unity.**
- **John Piper:** ***“Racial tensions are rife with pride—the pride of white supremacy, the pride of black power, the pride of**

intellectual analysis, the pride of anti-intellectual scorn, the pride of loud verbal attack, and the pride of despising silence, the pride that feels secure, and the pride that masks fear. Where pride holds sway, there is no hope for the kind of listening and patience and understanding and openness to correction that mature relationships require.”

- Or, as **Chris Green, one of our African-American pastors here**, says it—so much more simply, I think: ***We have skin issues because we have sin issues.**

C. Preference

- I looked around **one weekend at our church** and had this epiphany. In *our Saturday services at BCC: Southern Baptist*. They sing boisterously. When it's time for the message, they take out their *notebook*. Shout a punctuated Amen occasionally.
 - Every SB church has your random Amen guy... (parking lot; youth building...) That's what they say to me in sermons.
- That's different than our **AA members**—some of them talk back to me in full sentences with *nouns and verb clauses and questions* I wonder if I'm supposed to answer.
- Now, I contrast that with our **Korean members**, who are some of my favorite worshippers. I was watching a row of them one time at BCC, and they weren't singing, but shouting the worship songs..., but say **NOTHING** to me during the sermon. Something wrong?
- **I have a friend who is a missionary in TOKYO, talking about the Japanese.** If you look at the faces of Japanese believers in worship, they are extremely expressive, but everything they do is a whisper. When he asked them why, they said, *“We want to express our hearts to God by our emotions, but we also want not distract others from doing the same.”*
- **Now contrast that with some of our members who stretch before they come to church cause if you ain't sweatin'; you ain't praising...**

- And then you got a bunch of y'all in our church who don't know what they are doing. I love how Tim Hawkins describes the progression.
 - **Elbow flap (chicken wing)/ hold the TV set, big screen; Mime in a box. Village people, Rocky, touchdown; Charismatics who are washing heavens windows and Koreans trying to give Jesus a high-5**
- **And I haven't even brought up our Hispanic:** *I go down there sometimes when our services are over and they are not through with the 1st song set yet.*

Which one of those is God's favorite style of worship? AMEN

So, let me say this: In order to be a part of a multi-cultural of church, you have to be willing to be uncomfortable sometimes with people not doing things your way.

Vance Pitman: The way to **know you are part of a multi-cultural church** is that you often feel uncomfortable. Many who **want a multi-cultural church** only want a multi-colored one.

Bryan Lorrits, who has spoken here, says that we know multiculturalism was an issue in the early church because so much of Paul's letters talk about food. Food isn't an issue in a homogeneous church: You just eat your kosher meal and be happy. But when you got Gentiles showing up at the potluck, they start bringing in different dishes: Who brought the squirrel soufflé?

Wherever the Bible talks about food, we could sub in music.

- If you want a **diverse sanctuary**, have a **diverse dinner table**. If we want a diverse church, there is going to be things around the dinner table and in our customs that won't be your favorite.

D. Apathy

- I think this is a big one. It's just easier. When we try this, it's difficult. You get hurt. Misunderstood. I'll get more emails in response to this message—some feeling I said too much; others not enough. Sometimes it's easier just to forget it.
- But the **glory of the Jesus** and the success of the GC is worth it!

E. Lack of empathy

- Paul tells us that we should **bear each other's burdens**.
- **Many of you, especially in the majority culture**, need to say, "Help me understand how that feels, or why you think that way."
 - **James tells us** that we should be "*quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*"
 - If there were ever a place for us to apply this verse, it is in this area. Yes, there's a place for you to speak. "Be slow to speak" doesn't mean "never speak," it just means that you listen far more than you talk.
 - You **seek to understand** more than you seek to be understood.
- **To listen to someone is to love them.**
- *I like what Albert Tate, a great AA pastor, says: It's hard for me to love when I'm so busy trying to defend myself.*

We don't want to be a church that focuses so much on this relationship (vertical) that we neglect the pain of each other here (horizontal).

- Jesus told a parable: **Matthew 5:23–24**, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, (and this shows you Jesus understood pastors. He says it like any preacher would want it said: if you've got sin in your heart, leave your gift at the altar. Leave your gift. Don't take it with you. Go ahead and leave it and go get right with God.) leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them..."
- **I just want to say to many of you in the minority culture—I know that there are times we have been blind to some of the struggles**

you have had to go through. We don't want to be. We want to walk with you through these things, and share your burdens even as you share ours; and fight together for each other, because that's what family does.

F. Unforgiveness

- **Paul will tell us later in Ephesians (4)** that failure to bestow forgiveness is one of **Satan's main ways** of gaining a foothold in *any* relationship.
- A **failure to quickly forgive**, on all sides, is how this strife keeps going.
 - It's like Ghandi said, reflecting on Jesus' teaching, said, "If we insist on justice only being an eye for an eye, eventually the whole world will be blind." Someone has to break the chain.
- **Let me tell you a lie about forgiveness** that many of you believe, that keeps you in Satan's clutches. **The lie is:** *I can't forgive you until I know you that you know how much you've hurt me.*
 - **Think of it in marriage:** Wife hurts her husband, repents, asks for forgiveness, but he still doesn't think that she's understood the extent of his pain.
 - Now, there **are two sides to this:** Maybe she hasn't, and he needs to help her see that, and she, in love, needs patiently to work at understanding him.
 - **But**—and this is key—**if he makes his forgiveness of her conditional on her understanding everything about his pain**, a) he'll be holding himself captive to a standard she will likely never meet. B) What's he's saying is, "I can't forgive you until you've felt bad enough, because that's the only way you'll pay for your sin." That's not forgiveness. Forgiveness is extending grace even when someone doesn't deserve it.
 - **Jesus best teaching on this: E.g. Turning the other cheek.**
- ~~Paul's standard for forgiveness: "Be kind to one another, tender~~

hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Again, I say, "If there were ever a place to **"be quick to hear, slow to speak..."** To enter into someone else's pain. To give the benefit of the doubt wherever we can:

- Illustration: **girl at Hardee's**

There, I gave you 6 things that keep us from being able to achieve this.

- It's **no wonder** our society can't do it!

But what the **law is unable to accomplish**, the **power of new life accomplishes** in the gospel.

Write this down:

The gospel shows us that we are not ultimately defined by our culture

- **Trusting in Jesus** does not remove our cultural distinctives; it just shows us that we are not *ultimately* defined by our cultures. We are defined first by who we are in Christ
 - **I want to be careful here.** God created the rich, beauties of culture and God is not on a mission to erase them.
 - It's just that God gives you an identity that goes beyond and deeper than any of your culture.
- In saying that Christ has created "one, new man," Paul is introducing a concept some theologians call the concept of the "3rd race."
 - Let your first race represent...
 - Your second race...
 - 3rd race is...
 - It's not that my 1st race disappears, but my 3rd race—who I am in Jesus, becomes more formative than my 1st race.
- **My first race becomes insignificant enough to me** that I can lay it aside when I need to, because it doesn't ultimately define me.

- Paul himself is the example: 1 Cor 9. To the Jew I became a Jew, to those outside the law (Gentiles) I became like them. "To the Jew I became a Jew." How does Paul "become a Jew" if he is a Jew? Paul's Jewishness was so light to them he could take it on and off like a garment.
- Is your whiteness like that? Your blackness? Your Asian-ness? Can you lay that aside when you need to?

- Again, it's not that our previous cultures disappear, just that something greater starts to define you: **Galatians 3:27-29**: [27] For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Does your male and female disappear? No. Neither does your cultural identity. But in Christ there is no Jew or Greek or black, white and Hispanic...) [29] If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Here's another way of saying that: *The gospel gives us something that unites us greater than anything that divides us.*

- If you still feel division with other believers who love Jesus, it just shows that the gospel hasn't gone deep enough in your heart.
 - If, for example, you find out someone shares your political convictions and that makes you feel more at ease with them than when you find out they follow Jesus, that shows you the gospel has not gotten deep enough in your heart.
 - If you feel more kinship with other white people or black folk or Hispanic brothers than you do with other followers of Jesus, it shows you that your gospel identity has not gotten deep enough.
- ~~*This can happen to the best of us. Illus. The Apostle Peter had a racial compromise.*~~ Paul records his confrontation with him in Gal 2. He tells Peter that he needed to understand the gospel better.
 - ~~*Takes a lot of nerve to say that to Peter! Peter was the rock, remember? The church's chief witness. That takes guts!*~~

- But it shows you that ~~even the best of us~~ can have places where the gospel needs to go deeper than our heart.

The gospel teaches us to subjugate our preferences for others' salvation

How many of Jesus' preferences did he lay down when he came to rescue you? Can we not do that now for others? Really?

Can you feel the irony? We are going to **stand in church** worshipping a Savior who **gave up all his rights** for us, while we simultaneously insist that everyone else around us worship that Savior *the way that we prefer*? Can you think of a **greater hypocrisy**?

Conclusion/Music

SUMMIT—I want us to be committed to this.

Let me say: I want to applaud those of you who are.

- Especially those who are not part of the majority culture who have come to this church and chosen to make it your home. I know it's **not been easy for you**, but I believe that what you are doing is glorifying to Jesus and a great benefit to the Great Commission.
- When Paul went in to plant a church in a new city, he didn't plant a church for the Jews on the North side, and one for the Gentiles on the South. Instead, he planted one in the middle and taught them that **vertical relationship** with God should lead to horizontal relationships with each other.
- **That's what you're doing.** You could be worshipping more easily over there, but you have chosen to come across town, so to speak, and do the hard thing and come here. **Thank you.**

I want to encourage others of you to move beyond mere awareness to engagement.

- One of our pastors says: 4 stages: **A. Ignorance**→**B. Awareness**→**C. Intentionality**→**D. Gospel Community**
 - We always think that once we hit B, we automatically have achieved D, like we're playing 'Chutes and Ladders' or something. But the most important, and difficult link in the chain is "C"!
 - The gap between sympathy and integration is inconvenience.
- **Many of you are going to walk away from this agreeing with everything** I've said but having it change nothing in your life.
 - So, here's what I'm telling you needs to change: ***you need relationships with someone who is radically different than you.***
 - **Stop being a slactivist** and start pursuing gospel community!
- **The point of all this** is not that we have different colored faces in the audience on the weekend like some kind of United Colors of Benneton display.
- The point is that **we want know and love each other** and show the world that the greatness of Christ far exceeds any of our cultural differences or preferences. **Amen?**

We want to live multi-cultural lives, not host multi-cultural events.

I want that. Could we **PRAY** about that together? (I lead)

