

We Are Family

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Ephesians 2:11-22

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—¹²remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no 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 is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God,²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

1. Going to Church

One Sunday, a son tells his mom that he does not want to go to church. The mother asks him why he does not want to go. The boy says he has three reasons. First, he does not want to get up early on Sunday morning. Second, he does not feel comfortable at church. Third, the church people do not like him. His mother says that he has three reasons that he should go to church. First, he should go to church because God wants him to go to church. Second, there are many people who are waiting for him at church. Third, he is the pastor of the church. Church can often be a very inviting place, but for some people, going to church can be a difficult and trying experience.

2. We are God’s Family

In today’s scripture, Paul says, Christians have a very special relationship with each other. In 2:19 Paul says, “**you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also**

members of the household of God.” In other words, we are God’s family. I heard a pastor say, “We are living in a fairytale where we call each other ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ but only meet for an hour per week. If we look at our actions, it can look like we don’t care for each other even though we are a ‘family’.” As you may know, the church was started by Jesus’ disciples at Pentecost. The people were all Jews. But when they proclaimed the good news of the resurrection of Jesus to the Gentiles, many Gentiles became Christians. Many churches started by St. Paul consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. The Ephesian church was one of them. The relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles was not good. They often rejected each other even though they were part of the same church.

In Ephesians 2:19, Paul emphasizes that all members in the Ephesian church are members of God’s family. Paul contrasts their identity between the pre-Christian past and the Christian present of the readers. He reminds his Gentile readers of the fact that they were “**uncircumcised**” (2:11), “**excluded from citizenship in Israel,**” and “**without hope and without God**” (2:12) and “**foreigners**” to the covenants of the promise, and “**strangers and aliens**” (2:19). But now the Gentile Christians are “**citizens**” with God’s chosen people and “**members of God’s household.**”

Have you had an experience where you were excluded? Let me share with you my experience. While I was serving a church in Kansas City, MO, I participated in a pulpit exchange program. I preached in a Catholic Church and a Catholic priest came to my church to preach. The United Methodist Church shares communion with Catholics, but at the Catholic church, I wasn’t allowed to participate in communion, even though I was a guest preacher. I thought the experience was kind of interesting. Many churches have signs that say “welcome everyone,” but I felt like the experience from the inside could be very different from the signs on the outside.

3. One New Humanity

Although Eph. 2:14 says that Jesus “**has broken down the dividing wall**” between the people, the Christian church can sometimes seem like a very exclusive religious organization. There can be a lot of different reasons for this. Language, culture, interpretations of the Bible, political and social issues are some of the reasons that are often cited for differences in churches or division within church congregations.

Yet, Paul emphasizes in verse 15 & 16 that “[Jesus] has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.” Paul talks about the oneness between the Jews and the Gentiles. Everyone is a part of God’s family. In reality, many people are discriminated or excluded. But Jesus visits the Samaritan woman (John 4) and Zacchaeus, the tax collector (Luke 19), who are excluded in the community. How do we look at the example of Jesus and learn to treat and love others like Christ?

4. The Two Sons in Luke 15

We can respond in one of two ways. In Luke 15:11 and the following, we see the story of the prodigal son and the response to the prodigal son’s return by his father and his older brother. You may already know, but the father is so happy when his son returns. He throws a banquet to celebrate the son’s return and invites his friends to celebrate with him. The older brother, on the other hand, gets jealous and complains to his father. The older brother complains that his father never gave him even a young goat to celebrate with his friends.

The parable of the prodigal son tells us God’s unfailing love for us. His father could say “no” to his younger son when his son asks for his portion of his inheritance early, but his father grants his request, and the younger son sets off to distant lands and begins to waste his fortune in debauchery. When a famine hits the country, the younger son’s money runs out, and he finds himself destitute, in horrible conditions. At last, he comes to his senses. Although he is not sure of the welcome he will receive, he returns home. Upon seeing his son, the father, who has been watching and waiting for him, runs out to greet his beloved son with open arms. When his younger son asks for forgiveness, he does not listen to him because he has already forgiven his son. Instead he prepares a banquet for him. How long do you think the father has been waiting for his son? The Bible does not say anything about it. However, we can guess that he probably waits for his son for six months, a year or even a few years. Until his son comes back home, the father waits for his son from early in the morning until late in the evening. He could leave home to search for his son. But the father does not leave the older son. He waits for his son every day. We know that for parents waiting for their own children is harder than searching for them.

5. Searching for a Daughter

Recently I saw a video clip on a daughter who left home. Her mother visits her daughter's favorite restaurants and gives her daughter's picture and money and asks the owner to cook her favorite food if she comes. One day her daughter comes to one of the restaurants, but she has no money. The owner says to her to have a seat, and she will cook her favorite food. When the girl asks why the owner of the restaurant is so kind to her, she says there is a kinder person than she is. The kinder person is her mother. Our God is like the mother. He waits for His sons and daughters to come back home.

6. Conclusion

Paul says to the Gentile Christians in Ephesus that they are God's family. There is no one who can deny the special relationship we have with one another in God's family. Paul emphasizes that Jesus has come to **"create in himself one new man out of the two"** (2:15). The Jews and the Gentiles become one. Jesus Christ is **"the cornerstone"** (Eph. 2:20). Without the cornerstone, the house will collapse.

7. Application

Paul says that we are called to build **"together spiritually into a dwelling place for God"** (2:22). God wants us to be a spiritual holy temple. In God's holy temple, people experience hospitality, kindness, forgiveness, and open arms. God calls us to be a part of God's family welcoming and embracing those who are in need of His amazing love. What Paul suggests to the Roman Congregation is **"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep"** (Romans 12:15). While I was preparing this message, I noticed that I was thinking and acting like the older son. I felt I needed forgiveness from the Lord and from you. I am going to ask for forgiveness to the Lord by sing a hymn "Just as I am."

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, Thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down;
Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

I pray that when people come to Swift Memorial Church, they meet Jesus who has been waiting for them for a long time. Amen.