

Recall & React: Who Are We?

Ephesians 2:11-22 (Part 1)

I'm sure most all of you have heard John Lennon's song Imagine at some point in your life. I've always found that song fascinating just because of the brashness of the language and expectation of it. The driving message in the song is the desire that all human beings would live together in peace and harmony without fighting and war. Let me read you some of the lyrics to this song.

Imagine all the people
Living life in peace

You may say that I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man

Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world

It's clearly been a very influential song in our cultural mindset. We regularly hear calls for all just to get along and love each other. It's easy for Christians to react against the utopian desire for peace and harmony as an evil and worldly ideology. I actually think the desire for peace and harmony is a really good desire, but the problem with the worldly hope is that it's not based in the reality of sin and the brokenness of the world. And the path to peace and harmony always involves doing whatever people like John Lennon tell us to do. In the song imagine he says, I hope someday you will join us. We want peace and in order to get it you have to do what we say.

The desire for peace is good, but before we can pursue unity and harmony we have to recognize why we don't have it, and let the Bible determine HOW we pursue it. The book of Ephesians has unity, peace, and harmony right as a major

component of its message. And, the church is supposed to be a place of unity and peace in order to demonstrate to the world what Jesus has accomplished through his death. He has brought reconciliation between us and God and between one another. People who are so different have been brought together in Christ. Jesus is the only pathway to true unity and peace and as the church we are to be the people who showcase this unity to the world by the way we love one another.

Last week we focused on personal identity from Ephesians 2:1-10. We asked the question Who are You? and sought to answer it. But you see, when you are rescued, as we saw in Ephesians 2:1-10, it doesn't stop with your individual change. God isn't just about saving individuals. He's about creating a new people, called the church, who will together display His grace and glory through their unity. That's why we are asking ourselves this question, Who are We? this week. And here's how we are going to answer that question: **3 Facets of our unified identity as a church that motivate us to live in peace with one another.**

1. We Were Divided from One Another (vv. 11-13)

If you remember from verses 1-10 that Paul told them who they were before Christ and who they are now that they have met Christ. This section is set up in a very similar way. You can see that the word "therefore" in verse 11 connects this new section back to verses 1-10 and builds off verses 1-10. The personal change has community implications.

You can also see that Paul wants them to "remember". They will appreciate the current position they are in through Jesus if they remember the situation they used to be in. They were born into this condition. Look at the rest of verse 1. Of course, keep in mind that Paul is writing this to the Ephesians, who were Gentiles, born and raised in the Roman Empire.

One of the sharpest conflicts during this time period was between Jews and Gentiles. The Ephesians were Gentiles physically and this put them on the outside, distinct and in conflict with Jews. In many ways this conflict originated with the Jews. Circumcision was an incredibly important part of what it meant to be a Jew because it was the sign of their covenant with God. So, they looked down on Gentiles because they were not circumcised and were not in covenant with God. And Gentiles hated the way Jews looked down on them and the way Jews were distinct and separate from everyone else.

But this separateness did not put the Gentiles in a good situation. Why? **Because the Jews were God's chosen people and there were certain benefits that were excluded from the Gentiles.** Look at verse 12 as Paul articulates 5 benefits that kept Gentiles on the outside and fostered this division between Jews and Gentiles. **If you were born a Gentile up until the time of Christ, these were true of you.**

First, you were separated from Christ. Of course, the word Christ means Messiah, and Gentiles did not share in the Jewish hope and expectation of a Messiah or deliverer. **Second**, Gentiles were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. God did His work in the OT through His chosen people, Israel, so to be apart from this nation was a huge disadvantage. **Third**, they were strangers to the covenants of promise. These were the covenants based on promises, specifically the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic covenant and the New covenant. These were made to Israel and to be a Gentile meant you were on the outside looking in. **Fourth**, you were without hope. What hope of life forever could you have as a Gentile? **Finally**, you were without God in the world. The one true God, Yahweh, chose to reveal Himself to Israel and to be outside of Israel was to be without a relationship to the Creator God.

Paul summarizes these benefits elsewhere in Romans 9:3-5. **To be a Jew didn't mean that you were automatically in, but to be a Gentile almost certainly meant that you were already out.** Paul is reminding them of their former circumstances so that they can begin to rejoice in the truth of verse 13. Look there.

To be far off is another way of saying you were a Gentile. You were on the outside, but you have been brought near. **Now, this doesn't mean you have been brought near to being a Jew.** It means something entirely different and better than an ethnic identity as a Jew. You are "in Christ", united with Him. Notice the means by which you were brought near. The blood of Christ. **The cost of bringing you near as a Gentile was high indeed.** So, what exactly does this high cost purchase for Jews and Gentiles? That brings us to our second facet of our unified identity as a church.

2. We Are Reconciled to One Another and God (vv. 14-18)

We've seen the picture of division in verses 11-12 and here's what the blood of Christ accomplishes in light of that division. **It reconciles us to one another and to**

God. First, to one another. Look how Jesus is described at the beginning of verse 14. We are used to thinking of the death of Christ purchasing peace with God and that's gloriously true, but that's not what he's talking about in verse 14. Here, he's saying that the death of Christ brought reconciliation between people who were once divided.

Now, in verses 11-12 we saw that Jews and Gentiles were divided by ethnicity and specific religious practices, but divisions pop up all over the place in life, and often over the most trivial things. One experiment I read about divided people up into two groups based on a flip of a coin, but once they were divided into two groups they were more likely to give money to people in their group. They did this with a number of different criteria that separated the groups and no matter how trivial it was the people showed tribal tendencies favoring their own group.

We tend to divide and separate from one another in our natural state. We tend to hate those who are different from us. But, when you have been brought near to Christ, verse 14 says that Jesus becomes our peace. To be at peace with another human being means two things. First, it means a lack of hostility and second, it means a mutual acceptance. It's foregoing the disdain and growing in affection and love. Jesus is our peace through his blood.

Now, how exactly did He accomplish this peace between Jews and Gentiles? Look at the rest of verse 14. So, Jesus broke down the wall that was keeping Jew and Gentile apart. What was that? The first part of verse 15 tells us. What Paul means by this is the Mosaic Law as a covenant. The commandments and requirements of the Mosaic law are no longer the defining covenant for us today. The law is inoperable for us because of what Jesus did. And this accomplished peace as the end of verse 15 tells us.

So, Gentiles don't become Jews and Jews don't become Gentiles. It's not that those ethnic identities don't matter at all anymore. Whether you are a Jew or Gentile is still an important feature of who you are, but it's not of primary importance anymore. The Law of Moses does not prohibit Gentiles or define Jews anymore. Instead, those who are in Christ have become one new man. The language Paul uses here is amazing because he uses that word "created". Something completely new has been born. This new birth has put together people

who were so different and so hostile toward each other. But they have been brought together in peace.

But the horizontal peace that Christ's death has secured is not the only peace we now have. Look at verse 16. There's a vertical peace as well. The hostility being talked about here is not hostility between Jew and Gentile, but between God and man. Of course, this happened through the cross of Christ which is another way of saying through the blood of Christ.

Now, it wasn't only Gentiles who needed vertical peace with God. Look at verse 17. Jesus came and preached peace both to those who were far off, Gentiles, and peace to those who were near, Jews. Both groups ultimately needed what the New Covenant, brought through the death of Jesus provided. Why? Because of what Romans 3:9 says. Gentiles did not have access to the benefits that Jews did, but the Jews in many instances rejected those benefits and pursued their sin. The OT is quite clear that the Jewish people needed circumcision of the heart and that's exactly what the New Covenant promised and in Jesus provided.

The results of this reconciliation with God are staggering for both Jews and Gentiles. Look at verse 18. We both, together, now have access to God through the Holy Spirit. This is not saying that Gentiles can now approach God through the sacrificial system, through the Priests in the Temple, the way Jews did in the OT. We all have something so much better than that now. Listen to Hebrews 10:19-22. Because of the blood of Jesus we draw near in full assurance of faith and have confident access to God, something no Jew ever had in the Old Testament.

But in Hebrews I want you to notice what this confident access means. Listen to the next couple of verses 23-25. The confident access is not an individual access. It means that together, by the Spirit, Jews and Gentiles, black and white, men and women, rich and poor, raised in the church, not raised in the church, happily married, single mom all are unified in our approach to the throne. And we need one another.

This unity of once divided people is the driving application of the book of Ephesians. Look at Ephesians 4:1-6. If you are not actively pursuing unity among the believers in this church you are not grasping the gospel. The gospel is certainly individual redemption, but God is creating a people, a new man, through his blood to display the glory of reconciliation. So, how are you actively pursuing

peace with others in this church body? Keep in mind, peace is not just the absence of hostility. It's also the building of mutual affection.

We are going to look in more detail at how we pursue this unity next week in the 3rd facet in verses 19-22 but look at the beginning of verse 19. So then. He's going to give you the result of the equal access to the Father through the Spirit that we now have with one another. Let's pray.

Lord's Supper

To the Floor:

Words introducing Lord's Supper.

Silent Moment

Prayer

In light of the fellowship we have together in Christ's death, the custom of Woodhaven Bible Church has been to all partake of the elements together.

"Now you will receive a token of Christ's body"

Serve Bread

"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Elder Prayer

Let's take the bread together in remembrance of Christ.

Serve Cup

"In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Elder Prayer

Let's take the cup together in remembrance of Christ.