

**God's War Memorial: The Church of Jesus Christ (pt. 2)**  
Ephesians 2:11–22 | 10.15.2017 | More Than You Can Imagine

In his book *Theodore Roosevelt and the Making of American Leadership*, Jon Knokey tells the story of The Rough Riders . . . the 1000-man regimen gathered by Teddy Roosevelt to fight in the Spanish-American War.

At no moment in US history had so many diverse sets of individuals come together in the name of anything. It was chaos, . . . It was the society page, financial column, and wild west show all wrapped up in one, a reporter quipped.

[And] the diversity was accentuated by [their different clothes]. Some wore dude rags, standing collars, patent leather shoes, and hard-boiled hats. The millionaires and Fifth Avenue dandies were dressed in suits accompanied by “wagon loads . . . of solid leather trunks and hat boxes.” . . . The cowboys adorned chaps, high-heeled boots, and spurs. A few of the athletes, dressed casually in khakis and polo shirts, swung golf clubs or threw around a football. The miners and down-and-out's wore soiled and tattered blue denim overall jumpers. . . .

[In short] . . . the clash of cultures, personalities, antecedents, and wealth symbolized the greatest asset for a country on the rim of a new frontier: diversity.

[And this diversity symbolized something of their newfound leader – Teddy Roosevelt]

Knokey writes . . . “Amidst the chaotic sea of characters and happenings, a reporter for the *New York World*, recognized a single commonality: In many ways the regiment is an elaborate photograph of the character of its founder, **Theodore Roosevelt**. At odd times he is a ranchman, hunter, politician, reformer, society man, athlete, litterateur, & statesman. Only in his complex brain, with its intense versatility, could the idea of forming such a regiment have been born.

The story of Roosevelt, his Rough Riders, + their victory at San Juan Hill . . . is the stuff of legend.  
**But more . . . it is an illustration of the diverse temple army formed thru X's cross**

In the Rough Riders . . . we find a group of radically diverse people, unified by the skill and strength of one man . . . so that together they might win the battle.

And . . . in that victory they would bring glory to their nation and to their leader.

**This is what the Roosevelt story illustrates . . .**

That when a man is able to unify people . . . especially diverse people . . . and lead them to victory in battle . . . there is a certain legendary status given to that hero.

Indeed . . . how many movies celebrate this kind of champion.

From the *Bad News Bears* . . . to *Remember the Titans* . . . there is a kind of glory that radiates from leaders who defeat the odds, unify strangers, and defeat the enemy.

These are the stories we love to tell . . . and the stories that capture our imagination.

**But there's also a weakness in these stories . . .**

Every one of them is. . . limited . . . local . . . and consequently . . . short-lived.

Meaning . . . the hero only unified a specific people in a specific way for a specific time.

In every case . . . the glorious accomplishment came to some kind of end . . .

That is . . . its benefits were for a limited people . . . a limited time . . . and limited results.

Even when Abraham Lincoln emancipated the slaves . . . it would only be a few decades before conditions in the South for blacks. . . [was often worse than slavery.](#)

Indeed . . . Lincoln is rightly celebrated for his work in the Civil War.

But with his death came the end of his leadership . . . and the rise of Jim Crow.

So it goes with every leader in history . . . except one!

Contrast Roosevelt and Lincoln with Jesus Christ . . . and you find that Jesus' death did not end his impact. Rather . . . like a ring of fire . . . his work continues to spread into the world!

And that's exactly what we find described in Ephesians 2 . . .

HERE Paul testifies about what Christ accomplished by his death.

AND what he continues to achieve thru the preached gospel.

That's because Christ is seated at God's right hand . . . as Ephesians 1 tells us.

The message of the gospel is far more than a message of nostalgia

OR a legend to promote imitation.

Rather . . . the gospel literally creates a new people b/c the Son is sending the Spirit to give life and unify into holy his temple his redeemed people.

**In this way . . . the work X began on the cross is having its full effect throughout the world**

And this morning . . . that's what we will see in Ephesians 2:11–22 . . .

**How Christ is creating a new humanity through his cross . . .  
and as a part of that new creation temple . . .**

**He's calling you and I to remember who we are in Christ and what it means to live in community and on mission with him.**

## **Remember Your Identity in Christ (vv. 11–13)**

The first thing we see in verses 11–13 is call to remember who you were without Christ and who you are now in Christ.

This is the bedrock of Christian living and therefore the bedrock of the church.  
So . . . let me make a couple observations about these verses b4 we read them again.

### **1. The word “remember” is the only command in Ephesians 1–3.**

While Paul gives plenty of imperatives in Ephesians 4–6 . . . the first three chapters are all centered on the indicative . . .

That is to say . . . the foundation of our identity is not in what we do or in what we don’t do . . . It’s what God has done in Christ . . . and we must REMEMBER that!

Therefore, it is striking that Paul’s command in these chapters is to remember!

### **2. These verses are built on an important “At One Time . . . But Now in Christ” Chassis**

Just like cars and trucks are built on chassis that support them . . .

So . . . Paul’s words about identity depend on a framework that looks BACK to who we were before Christ . . . and UPWARD to who we NOW are in Christ.

Significantly, this gospel chassis repeats what Paul did in **Ephesians 2:1–7**.

There . . . he lists the sins of all humanity . . . and then he says “But God . . .”  
Now . . . he’s going to do the same thing . . . but he says this time “But now in Christ”

So . . . verse 13 is a glorious parallel to verse 4 . . . and together we see how the Father and the Son work together to secure the believer in God’s family.

And . . . as we’ll see . . . it’s not too much to say that failure to build your life on the chassis of the gospel will result in emotional instability or a spiritual weakness.

### **3. Most particular to this passage . . . the focus of these verses addressed to Gentiles.**

While Ephesians 2:1–3 can speak to the sin of every person, these words are specifically addressed to Gentile believers. **Why does Paul focus on the Gentiles?**

I think the reason is that Paul wants to show how the gospel reconciles groups of people . . .

NOW . . . the community God is creating is not just made up of scattered individuals . . .

Rather . . . God is making 1 new man from 2 groups of people who despise one another.  
This community will be seen in vv 14–22 . . . but first let’s see what Paul says about our ID

## READ vv. 11–13 . . .

Walking through these verses we see in verse 11 . . . Paul set the Gentiles in the flesh apart from the Jews who were circumcised in the flesh.

It's clear he's choosing his words carefully . . . because he's not denying the ongoing cultural or racial realities of these two groups.

He's not going to say that in the church . . . we can or should be color-blind.

Rather, he's making a statement that the Gentiles in the flesh had no share in the blessings of God.

Interestingly . . . in a backhanded way . . . he says the same thing about the Jews.

**Notice** . . . he calls the Jews the circumcised “made in the flesh by hands.”

If you don't recognize it . . . this is not a compliment.

Often in the OT . . . the Prophets referred to idols as **things made by hands**.

Hand-made was a statement of uncleanness . . .

So here . . . Paul is hinting at the same . . . the Jews had idolized circumcision and prided themselves on their standing above Gentiles.

Such pride didn't change the position of the uncircumcised, but it's just interesting to see how Paul balances his words.

So in verse 11 . . . he identifies the Gentiles according to the flesh.

Then in verse 12 . . . he lists five realities of the Gentiles outside of Christ

1. **They were separated from Christ** = they had no promise of Savior. As Paul says in Acts 17 . . . the Gentiles groped in the darkness . . . and had no Messiah to wait for.
2. **They were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel** = the promise of God's kingdom was not theirs; God has promised himself to Israel . . . not to anyone else

*This means . . .*

3. **They were strangers to the covenants of promise . . .**

Now there's some debate about what this means . . .

Some think "covenants of promise" refers to certain kinds of covenant in the OT . . . like Paul has in mind God's covenant with Abraham but not his covenant with Israel which gave the Law.

This view is fairly common . . . but the problem with it . . . is the way it fails to see how God's covenants with A, I, and D . . . are related . . . even connected . . .  
. . . as one covenant builds on another . . . to form a series of covenants in the flesh

So . . . it's better . . . in my estimation . . . to understand "of promise" as referring to all the covenants offering redemption God made with Israel in the OT.

Paul's point . . . IS NOT . . . that the Gentiles are NOT in covenant with God – they are

As sons and daughters of Adam . . . everyone IS in covenant with God . . . coming through the covenant with Noah . . . all people are in covenant relationship with God . . . only humanity has broken those creation covenants and stand under judgment

Paul's point . . . then . . . is that only Israel was promised redemption, salvation, and the blessing of God.

And thus Paul says the Gentiles were strangers to the covenants of promise.  
. . . **without God and without hope in the world.**

These are the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> conditions . . . separated from Christ, alienated from God's kingdom, strangers to his promises . . . without hope and without God.

And Paul . . . desperately wants the Gentiles to remember this condition . . . so that they can appreciate what he says next . . . **But now in XJ you who once were far off . . .**

This is the believers hope and the believer's new found Identity . . . and it is something that we are called to grow into . . . by remembering what Christ has done.

Here's the thing . . . coming to X doesn't solve every problem we face . . . In X we can still be discouraged . . . we can still struggle, still suffer, still sin . . . and Sin Badly!

And because of that . . . Satan throws our sins and our suffering at us and tempts to question God . . . his goodness . . . and our identity in Christ.

And when this happens . . . when we question who we are . . . what Christ has done . . . Satan disables us from strength of Xian community and the mission of the gospel.

IN THIS            He can't steal us from God's omnipotent hands . . . but he can discourage us  
                         and . . . disable our hands . . . IF we don't know what it means to be in Christ . . .  
                         OR if we forget what Christ has done

**Therefore . . . the foundation of Paul's argument is to solidify our ID in X.**

## **(Re)Adjust to Your Community in Christ (vv. 13–18)**

### **[PAUSE]**

From that foundation . . . that cornerstone of Christ's crucifixion in verse 13 . . . Paul explains how the community of faith is created through the work of Christ in vv. 14–18.

In fact, if verses 11–13 call the believer to remember their identity in Christ.

These verses call us to remember WHO Christ is and WHAT he has done ... but they also go further and invite us to Adjust and Readjust Our Expectations for Xian Community.

So let's look first at what Christ has done to unify us to one another . . . and second at how his work on the cross prompts us to readjust our expectations in church.

**First** . . . notice how Christ IS our peace . . . how he has MADE peace . . . and how he is PREACHING peace.

In v. 14 . . . Paul summarizes the way in which Christ in his person is our peace.

As this section fulfills the words of Isaiah 56 . . . which we read earlier in service  
And as Ephesians 2:17 quotes from Isaiah 57:19 . . . it's very likely that the idea that Christ IS our peace also comes from Isaiah.

Repeated in Isaiah . . . the Prophet says that those who are wicked cannot have peace . . . but that in his mercy God would send his servant king to be the prince of peace.

And this is who Jesus is . . . he is the Son of God . . . the King of Israel . . . who came not to be served . . . but to serve . . . to give his life as a ransom . . . to be crushed for our iniquities . . . and as Isaiah 53 says . . . to bring us peace.

**Peace with God . . . and peace with one another.** . . . This is exactly what Paul speaks of here . . . and the list of peace-making is glorious.

**v. 13** – he speaks of Gentiles who were far off coming to the Lord . . . This again picks up temple imagery . . . that those who had no access to God can now in X come near.

**v. 14** – Paul describes the two (Jew and Gentile) who were by culture and law divided into two people now being made one new humanity.

. . . He describes the literal wall that stood in the temple which divided Jew and Gentile

. . . **Josephus** described how this four-foot high wall issued a threat of death to any Gentile that would cross the threshold

. . . so in this physical obstacle in the temple . . . there symbolized the division between Jew and Gentile

. . . **And Paul says that through Christ's death which ended the Old Covenant and Inaugurated a NC . . . God has joined together Jew and Gentile in Christ.**

After this . . . Paul continues this theme of peace-making in v. 15

**v. 15** – explains how Christ unified Jew and Gentile

. . . he says Christ tore down the wall of hostility **by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances**

. . . IOW . . . by perfectly keeping the Law, Jesus was the perfect manifestation of the law . . . and thus when he was stapled to the cross . . . God nailed the law with its legal demands to that cursed tree.

. . . in his flesh and blood . . . Jesus paid the penalty for all the curses that the Law demanded for covenant breakers . . . This meant . . . those who deserved to die under the law were set free by Christ's death

. . . and those who would die outside of the law – **the Gentiles** – they too received atonement for their sins . . . because in Christ God looked at their sins as covered by the blood Christ.

. . . in this way, v. 15 says, God made one new man in place of the two.

. . . instead of Jew and Gentile according to the flesh

. . . instead of circumcised and uncircumcised

**. . . now there was one new creation in Christ.**

. . . it's important to see that the language of **new creation** occurs here . . .

. . . it says that by his death . . . Christ **CREATED** in himself one **NEW** humanity.

*And still he's not done . . .*

**v. 16** – says Christ reconciled both of us (Jew and Gentile) to God in one body through the cross . . . thereby killing the hostility.

. . . hostility is the same word as in **v. 14** . . . which leads me to see the hostility as related to the sinful opposition to the Gentiles that arose in the heart of the Jews.

While the OT law was designed to make Israel a priesthood to the nations . . . a conduit of blessing . . . because of the hardness of their hearts . . . they became people who despised the nations and excluded them from the promises.

But now in Christ . . . **v. 17** says . . . citing Isaiah 57:19 . . . **he (Christ) came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.**

And this is the third marker of peace – Christ **IS** peace, in his cross he **MADE** peace, and now through his Holy Spirit he **PROCLAIMS** peace to the world . . . bringing in those far & near. And importantly . . . these verses then explain how Christ creates more than individual believers

These verses explain how the proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection create a people.

A people of diverse backgrounds . . . diverse races . . . diverse cultures . . . diverse tastes.

A people whose diversity when unified in Christ exclaims the power of God's grace.

This is what Christ's cross is creating . . . a diverse community . . . centered on X.

And yet . . . when we look at churches today . . . we often don't see that kind of diversity.

We see on Pentecost . . . Jews from all over the Mediterranean receiving the HS

We see in Acts 13 the diversity of names + people . . . in the church at Antioch

We see in Ephesians 2 . . . the spiritual unity of Jew and Gentile . . .

And yet in churches throughout the US . . . we see an ongoing racialization.

### **Why is that?**

There are lots of reasons . . . many of them are chronicled in a book called *Divided by Faith* . . . If you want to stretch your understanding of church history in America . . . and why the church in America is so racially segregated . . . you need to read it.

**But one of the reasons it points to is the way modern American Xians seek comfort . . .**

In fact . . . through the surveys outlined in *Divided by Faith* . . . the authors show how in the free market of churches . . . COMFORT is one of the greatest reasons why a person or family chooses a church . . . and because we are most comfortable with people like ourselves . . . we gravitate towards comfortable churches.

**And hence the racial divisions created by slavery and reinforced by Jim Crow remain.**

Oh . . . how the idol of comfort preserves prejudices . . . and veils the glory of God in the church.

And I bemoan comfort . . . not as someone who has mastered it . . . but as someone who needs help to fight against it

And that's why I need **Eph 2** . . . to remember the cross of Christ . . . and what the cross of Christ created . . . a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-socioeconomic X-centered EKK

But for such a church to exist . . . we must draw deeper on our identity in Christ . . . and we must love the agonies of the cross . . . more than the comfort of our flesh.

Indeed . . . we must learn from Scripture . . . that the discomfort experienced in church – **not created by church** – is not reason to leave church . . . but a sign that God is at work.

Consider this . . .

What if the goal of church is not your comfort . . . but your discomfort?

What if the peace that Christ has won for you in his cross . . . is not meant for easy, breezy, feelings of peace . . . but for you to fight injustice and become a peace-maker?

What if God's design was for you is to stay in long-standing, uncomfortable relationships with people unlike yourself . . . because this will better display his power?

**Are you interested in that kind Christianity . . . that kind of church . . . ??      GOD IS**

That's exactly what God is building in his church . . . a people whose diversity is unified in Christ alone . . . and who must themselves pick up their cross to display his wisdom!

Friends . . . this is where the community of the church leads to the mission of the church.

In Ephesians 2:11 . . . Paul begins by reminding the Gentiles of their identity in Christ

By Ephesians 2:13 . . . he is moving into the community that Christ is creating . . .

. . . a community unlike anything that this world knows

. . . indeed it is a community that defies human explanation

. . . thus prepares the world to hear of this race-reconciling, sinner-unifying G

And this is why Paul calls God's new creation . . . the household of God in v. 19, the temple of the Lord in v. 21, and the dwelling place of the Spirit in v. 22.

It's because . . . the church is far more than a social gathering . . . or a platoon of individual evangelistics.

It is a cross-centered community ... revolting against the pride & prejudices of this world

In the church . . . we find a demonstration . . . that racism, classism, and narcissism are put to death . . . as people are nailed to the cross of Christ and raised to life by his HS.

As we learned last week . . . this is what temples always represented . . . the power of a God to defeat his enemies and save his people.

Now . . . we are that temple . . . on mission to display in our body God's wisdom & grace

And this is where . . . similar to Roosevelt's Rough Riders . . . we must learn to trust, love, and fight with—not against—those not like ourselves.

This is what it means to be the church . . . fitted together by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And we must catch this vision from Ephesians 2 . . . if our church is going to succeed in displaying Christ to the world.

If we are going to be a people who herald the gospel with power and endurance, we must see how Ephesians teaches us to live as a community together.

And how the first step in our mission is not individual obedience to the commands of Ephesians 4, 5, 6.

No . . . Our first objective is to remember who we are.

Community memory is what Ephesians 2 calls us to.

To remember who we were before Christ . . .

To remember what Christ has done for us . . .

To remember that now in Christ . . . all our differences have been united by the blood of Jesus . . . and the working of his Holy Spirit.

### **Church . . . This is our mission.**

Before we can go effectively go into the world . . . we must learn what it means to be X's

And to do that . . . he has bound us together with himself and with one another. . . so that he might shape us, mold us, and make us like himself.

In this way . . . church is not only a temple . . . it's a training ground where a multi-colored priesthood learns how to live and love for the glory of God.

In this breaking and building process . . . God calls blood bought sinners to learn through intense discomfort how to love OA . . . and to fight the enemy and not themselves.

Sadly . . . its in the army where we see this kind of diverse unity more than the church . . . and yet what does this say about our Master and Commander . . .

**Prior to the suffering they experienced in camp** . . . the regiment was an assorted set of individuals from every walk of life, a mob of characters clinging to their own factions, speaking and acting in partisan terms. Now, as the train charged east, they were wholly united, the latest incarnation of the American frontiersman. They were still wild and unruly, rowdy and boisterous—prone to extraordinary insubordination. But now they trusted one another and wanted to fight together. They were not a mob; they were frontiersmen. (Loc 5315)

**Oh Church** . . . this is who we are – a band of wildly diverse brothers and sisters . . . brought together by the cross of our Captain . . . Let us remember him . . . what he has done . . . so that we can be what he died for us to be . . .