

Text: Ephesians 2.11-22
St Stephen's

July 25th, 2004
Sun AM

Into The Royal Family

If you look back over the past 100 years and ask what are the major movements that dominated the world, **one word** surfaces again and again, “**alienation**”. Karl Marx popularized the word, and believed that the fundamental fact of life was **economic alienation**, where workers were disconnected from the purpose and results of their labor. Others have focused on the **political alienation** that people feel in response to an increasing distance from the exercise of power and decision making in their countries.

Today the word has new life as people feel increasingly **disconnected** from their world. For the past thirty years this alienation has received a strong push in our own culture with **the rise of personal individuality**, self-expression, self-esteem, and self-fulfillment. Today you and I live in a very **disconnected society**. You don't know all your neighbors or many of the people you work with. Many of our most important relationships are shallow and lightly connected. They are easily broken and fractured. Just think about the frequency of **divorce**. Think about how often you have **moved** from one community to another. We are disconnected and it doesn't sit well with us; we feel out of touch with our world, and our neighbors and ourselves. In a world that is more closely connected than ever by modern life and technology, loneliness and stress are running at **epidemic levels**.

Dr. Edward Hallowell has written a book simply called Connect. He says, “*We are a nation of doers. We hurry from place to place, filling our lives with all kinds of activities, sometimes over scheduling our kids and ourselves. But what really sustains us emotionally, psychologically and physically is **connectedness**, the feeling that we are part of something that matters, something larger than ourselves that gives life meaning. Just as there is a vitamin deficiency, there is a human contact deficiency and it weakens the body, the mind and the spirit. Its ravages can be severe – depression, physical illness, early death. Or they can be mild – under achievement, fatigue, and loneliness.*” We know **the disease of disconnectedness**.

In his letter to the **Ephesians**, Paul says this alienation is one of the central problems in the world. It was a problem not just in our modern world, but in his ancient world as well. The last part of Ephesians 2 that we are looking at this morning is **how God solves the problem of alienation**.

When Paul describes **the ancient world** he says it is **divided**, just like our modern world. The major division he saw was spiritual and religious. He says there are **two groups**:

- Some people are “**near**” to God (Jews). Some people are “**far away**” from God (Gentiles).

Doesn't that sound familiar, by the way? Don't you know people who seem closer to God... and others who seem so far away? Paul describes the Gentile nations who were far away.

“In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from God's people, Israel, and you did not know the promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.”

Eph 2:12 (NLT)

William Hendriksen summarizes this verse with this description of how we used to live: “Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and Godless”

Last week in the first three verses of this chapter, we looked at a similar, sobering set of words: disobedient, drifting, deceived, dead and doomed. Paul hammers away at this theme because we will never understand the height of his grace until we understand the depth of our trouble.

Then Paul goes on...

- In between the Jews and Gentiles was a “wall of hostility”
“the dividing wall of hostility” Eph 2:14

This was **an actual wall** that surrounded the Temple in Jerusalem. It was several feet high, and was intended as a barrier to keep Gentiles out of that holy place. On this wall was **an inscription**: *“No foreigner may enter within the barricade that surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death”*.

We know **walls like this**. Think of the **Berlin wall** that marked the border between communist countries of Eastern Europe and those of the free West. You

would try and escape to freedom at risk of your life. Or think of the **security wall** that is being built around Israel to protect it from suicide bombers. Walls like this are **physical symbols of the alienation** that people feel from one another.

But notice one more thing about Paul's assessment of the Jews and the Gentiles. When he says that some are "near" and others are "far"...

- Note that neither group is "***there***" yet, because both groups need ***Christ***
He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. Eph 2:17

He preached peace to them both because **both needed reconciliation**. Isn't that true? People who live bad lives need Christ. Everyone knows that. But people who live good lives need Christ, too. Because no one is good enough. The tax collectors and sinners needed Christ. Everyone knew that. The religions leaders of Israel needed Christ, too. Because no one is religious enough.

Someone once said...

"No one is so near as not to need his grace. No one is so far as to be beyond the reach of his grace." Unknown

This, then, is the fundamental **fact of alienation**. People **need reconciliation** with each other. People need reconciliation with God. People are **disconnected** with each other and disconnected with God. **At war** with each other and at war with God.

Now here is God's solution...

His Solution: He Is Building A Royal Family!

That is what He is doing in the world. He is solving the problem of alienation by welcoming people into his own family...

This is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. Eph 1:10
(NLT)

Every dividing wall will give way before him. Whether it is the great economic and political philosophies of the centuries... Marxism or communism or imperialism or capitalism. **Across every wall Jesus will gather into his Royal Family**

Every dividing wall will give way before him. Whether it is the dividing walls built on circumstances of life like racism or sexism or nationalism... **Across every wall Jesus will gather into his Royal Family**

What I want to do with you this morning is take a look at...

How We Get Into His Family

You have to...

1) Let Jesus Take Away the Barricades That Separates Us

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... Eph 2:14

The wall around the temple was a symbol of a spiritual barrier that separated Jews and Gentiles. The barrier was the religious law of Israel. Jesus fulfilled that law with all of its codes and religious regulations. When he did that, the physical wall lost its significance. When Paul wrote these words, the physical wall was still standing. About 10 years after he wrote this letter, the Roman army invaded Jerusalem and destroyed the wall and the Temple. But it had already lost its spiritual significance.

Do you know that many people never thought that the gap between Jews and gentiles could ever be bridged? They hated each other. Jews referred to gentiles as dogs. They avoided all contact with each other. **Jesus can take away barricades** – no matter how deep, no matter how wide, no matter how longstanding.

That is how his family grows. That is what he is doing in the world. If you come to Jesus, you are signing up for that kind of ministry.

2) Let Jesus Reconcile Us to God and Each Other

(by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations) His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, 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. Eph 2:15-16

That is **the process**: first reconcile us to God and then reconcile us to each other.

The place where peace is created is the cross:

Note the phrases... “*in his flesh*”, “*through the cross*” The cross is the place where barriers can be destroyed, where hostilities can be ended, where forgiveness can be received and given.

Look at this next verse...

through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Eph 2:18
 People are together (“we both”) and together we have **access** to God. Together we come through Jesus. Together we share his Spirit. Together we have access to the throne room of God, and find that we are in his family – that God himself is our Father. All of us together, with access to all of Him!

Every dividing wall evaporates. Hatred? Gone. Sin? Forgiven. Men and women – together in his presence! White and black – together in his presence! Rich and poor and 1st world and 3rd world – together in his presence!

If you need peace and reconciliation, meet him at the cross.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. Eph 2:14 (NIV)

Paul closes the chapter with a couple of pictures of Christ’s Royal family. I want to finish with them this morning...

His Royal Family: We Are Citizens in a Kingdom

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household...”

Eph 2:19

Do you know that when the Berlin Wall came down, a lot of people hesitated to cross it because they didn’t think they had the right papers. God gives you your papers when you come to Jesus. You are a citizen of his Kingdom, and that means... **Living It: I Belong and I am Needed**

When you're disconnected you're not very effective. The most vulnerable people in the world are **refugees**. They have no protection, no rights, no family to help them, and no country to live for. But that is not true of believers. You belong to the family. You are needed for the task. Do you know that when any foreigner

becomes a citizen of this country, they have to take an **oath of allegiance**?

These are some of the phrases they have to affirm...

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by law; ... that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God...

When you join his family you take up the family cause above every competing cause. The bible is your constitution. You have full access to the highest halls of power. Every need will be met. Every prayer heard. You fellow Christians are your family. You will **defend** the family against every enemy, *foreign or domestic*. In this family, **reconciliation** will reign. Love will triumph. Healing will prevail, because **the cross** of Jesus will be our gathering place. Every dividing wall will give way before him. Every political party or movement, every religion, every circumstance of life like racism or sexism or nationalism... **Every barrier will fall inside his Royal Family**

You are **on mission for him**. That means you are in **the gospel business**. Across every barrier and every wall with the love of Jesus! Over every prejudice and hatred with his healing! Open the doors to his family! Go after the refugees and wanderers! We are on mission to the neighborhoods and the nations. **You are citizens. You belong. You are needed.**

Here's the last picture of His Royal Family: We are Stones in a 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.”

Eph 2:20-22

Why did God choose a building as a picture of what the church is like? Because in a building, **all the connected parts support each other**. The foundation and the cornerstone support the floors, and the floors support the walls, and the walls support the rafters, and the rafters support the roof. They're all connected and they're all supporting. **Doesn't that sound like a movement of small groups and ministry teams to you?**

Living It: I am Connected and Supported

He is joining you together, (would you **circle the phrase “joined together”** on your outline?), shaping you (that means chiseling away your rough edges) and molding you and fitting you. Then he sets you in place – and Jesus is the builder here. You are mortared to others around you, and **they support you and you support them**. You lean on them and they lean on you. You hold them up and they hold you up and together you hold others up. That is how the building rises and grows.