

One in Christ (Eph 2:11-22)

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[0 : 0 0] Well done, Dom. Well done, everyone who sang and threw a mask. I can kind of understand more why ninjas are so quiet, because, I mean, man, if you have to talk a lot, you know, with all that cloth in front of your face. But hey, there's a small price to pay for the privilege of coming together and hearing God's Word, isn't it? Yeah. Before we start, I'd love to invite you, if you can't really see here and you want to kind of sneakily move over, now's your chance if you want to come over to this side a bit and, you know, if that would help you. But otherwise, just listen in and, yeah, we'll hear what God has to say to us from this passage. Shall we pray together? Father, once upon a time, we were separated from you. We were so far from you. We didn't even know who you were or your love for us. And now, in Christ, you have brought us near to you. We've just sung about this amazing grace. We've sung about how great you are. So help us to now remember, as we think of this passage, remember our shared access together to you. Remember that we are citizens of heaven together with Christ. And remind us of the amazing blueprint that you've mapped out for us as God's church, as God's dwelling place. Would you be with us now as we hear from you? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

One day, an older man gets his phone out and he presses record. And then he starts to talk to the video, right? And he starts slamming young people. And in this video, you can find on TikTok, if you like. He says this, the millennials and Gen Z, they've got this Peter Pan syndrome.

They don't ever want to grow up. They think that the utopian ideals in their youth, they're going to somehow translate into adulthood. And he's going to start kind of laying down the law for them. And then as he lectures to the camera, teens listened. And then they got out their phones and their art pads. And can you guys guess what they replied with? They replied with the phrase, okay, boomer. Okay, what does that mean? Okay, boomer. This was 2019's phrase of the year, apparently. How would you explain this phrase to someone? Okay, boomer. Does it kind of mean you're old and you don't get it? Does it kind of mean your close-minded way of seeing the world is not cool? Or does the fact that you have to try and explain it mean that you're out of the age group already? So, okay, boomer. That's a tricky phrase, isn't it? But whatever it means, when you get out of the receiving end of it, some people find it quite offensive, don't they? If you're the boomer, right? And I mean, sure, look, we're in a slightly different culture. We're in a more Asian culture. I couldn't imagine this term really going viral. I can't imagine saying, okay, boomer to my granddad or that sort of thing. Just seems a little bit off. But whether it's banter at work or whether it's schoolyard bullying, all of us, I think at some stage, have experienced some kind of name-calling, haven't we?

Maybe this isn't the phrase that we've been called. But maybe we've called other people names. I mean, if you look carefully at our passage, the way it started, where Domini read, it seemed there was a bit of name-calling, right? During Paul's day when he wrote Ephesians 2.11, right?

[3 : 4 2] There was a bit of name-calling. Someone's called the uncircumcised, and then the other's called the circumcised. It's a bit awkward, hard to imagine being categorised by the type of skin you have or don't have. But hang on. Have you heard the name honky before?

Have you ever been called a banana or a fob? Maybe we can relate. And I mean, growing up, I know I've certainly had some terrible names thrown at me. And maybe if I was honest, I've thrown some pretty bad names out at others too.

And name-calling, I think, reflects a little bit of us and them, doesn't it? I mean, look around us today. Look around us. Think about the world we live in. One of the saddest things about this past year, I think, is how tribal our whole world has become.

I mean, if there's a word that could sum up our past year, I don't think it's COVID. I think it's division, right? There's name-calling all around us, reflecting this us versus them, right? Whether it's calling someone wokester or Karen, lefty, capitalist, you're an ally or you're an enemy.

And then we come to church, and you think it'd be better, but sometimes, sometimes we put them to shame, don't we? Call each other conservatives or liberals, caros or people that don't believe in the Spirit.

[5 : 06] You're yellow or you're blue. It's interesting, isn't it? Interesting. I've lost count of the number of church plants that were actually just church splits. People, not just name-calling, but dividing physically.

Whether it's race or culture or politics or social issues, we live in a world where we seem to be more connected, but more divided. And so what is the power? What is the power to unite people hostile to each other and divided from each other?

What is the power to build a lasting, true community of people from different backgrounds, cultures, life experience, or to even keep a church family from drifting apart?

It's the gospel. It's the gospel. And Paul lays it out here, right? So in our passage, we're going to hear how the gospel can make us one in Christ. I hope that's interesting to you.

I hope that you really want this for our church. In this passage that Domini read, Paul makes just one clear command, and you'll see it in 11, right? Therefore, remember.

[6 : 16] Therefore, remember. Everything else in our passage follows this one command. So today, that's all I'm going to do. I'm going to walk through three things that I want us to remember as PCBC English.

Okay? As Paul tells us. Three things. Firstly, remember once you were separated. Secondly, remember now the cross has brought you near. And finally, remember what we now share in Christ. Three things to remember. Separation, the cross bringing us near, and what we now share. That's what we see in the passage. Firstly, remember this.

Remember that once you were separated. Okay, we're going to talk about circumcision, right? We don't skip the hard bits. I mean, that's what Paul asks us to think about.

Because Paul could have said, therefore, remember once you were Gentiles, and then just go on straight to verse 12. But in our passage, he doesn't. He doesn't. So I'll give a brief overview.

[7 : 16] Throughout history, one of God's ways of setting Israel, the nation of Israel, apart from their surrounding nations was this practice of circumcision. And he started it with Abraham and his family.

We read this in Genesis 12. God promises him that through your seed, your offspring, I will bless all the nations. Right? That's Genesis 12. And so, kind of in a related way, right?

When God is making a covenant in the Old Testament, literally he says when he cuts a covenant with someone. Okay, like he cut a wedding cake to symbolize something. He cuts a covenant with Abraham and his family.

So, in a funny way, he asks them to remember the special relationship that God has with his people. Through a cutting. A cutting that closely connects with how they actually will have a family. Will spread that family. I know we don't get it fully, but circumcision was God's permanent reminder to God's people. Through your offspring, your seed, I will bless all the nations of the earth.

[8 : 20] Does that make sense? Kind of. And look, I get it. To us today, even talking about this, I feel a little bit gross. Sounds kind of creepy.

Why couldn't God have used a different sign? Like, I don't know, put on a t-shirt or something. But yet, for Paul's readers in the first century, they must not have been too fussed about it.

Okay, so there's a bit of cross-cultural gap that we don't have. And in fact, I think they weren't fussed about being called circumcised. In fact, it seems like for them, this was kind of like a badge of honour.

It's hard to believe, right? That you'd be proud of this title. But names are funny like that, right? We don't always know how to explain why people see it as something they're proud of or ashamed by. Except in this case, it seems like it made them hostile towards those who weren't circumcised. So actually, if I read here, it says called uncircumcised.

[9 : 18] Actually, literally, it's almost accusing someone of being a foreskin person. You see, it's actually quite vulgar. You see, instead of pointing to God's original promise to bless the nation, here are some people defining themselves by what they had or didn't have.

And they're saying, we're here and you're out there. Name calling. So Paul says, once you were separated physically, stuck in different groups.

But more important than one another division is the divide between us and God. Have a look at verse 12. Remember that at that time, you were separate from Christ.

Excluded from citizenship in Israel. And foreigners to the covenants of the promise. Without hope. And without God in the world. You see, friends, before hearing the good news, we weren't just separated from God's people, right?

The Israelites. More crucially, we were separated from God's chosen king. The promised one. They called him the Messiah. We now know him as Jesus.

[10:32] Because without Jesus, without this particular descendant of Abraham, there is no hope for anyone, Jew or Gentile, to be part of God's spiritual family.

You see that? Paul is reminding us, as we hear this, of our sad situation. Once upon a time, we were excluded from citizenship in God's kingdom. We were foreigners to God's great promises. You and I were once far away. Hopeless. And literally, without God, when it says without God, the literal word is literally we were atheists. We were without God, but in a bad way.

And maybe some of the Ephesians hearing this might have answered back, hang on. You make it sound like it's all bad news, but I'm religious. I'm pretty devoted. I'm devoted to my gods, like Apollo and Artemis and Zeus.

Maybe you're sitting here, and you might think, hang on. My life's not hopeless. I have a good family. I do well at school or at uni, or my work. I feel like I've got good prospects.

[11:38] Yet the Bible tells you this, tells us this. When you and I try to live our lives each day without reference to the one true God, we are actually far from God.

Far from the true knowledge and hope that only God can bring. Now some people think that the way to draw near to God, the God of the Bible, you have to become Jewish, literally.

All right? I want you to introduce you to a guy called Jacob. Now Jacob, he grew up, that's the guy on the left, he grew up in the city of Kaifong and Henan in China.

He's Chinese, but he actually was descended, he believed, from the Jews. And so in 2009, he and five friends moved to Israel, adopted Jewish names, stayed away from barbecue pork and everything like that, learned Hebrew, even got circumcised.

And sure, now they may be joined to the Jewish community in modern day Israel, but according to Paul in verse 12, Jacob and his friends are still apart from Christ, Jesus the Messiah.

[12:47] They are still excluded from Israel's citizenship. How can that be? You see, Paul's smart. He knows how easy it is for us to think, oh, I'm part of God's people by doing stuff, by outward appearances, but not truly in my heart.

Because Paul here, he seems to make a distinction between someone who calls themselves a circumcision, in verse 11, and in verse 12, someone who is a citizen of Israel.

I think here he means Israel in a spiritual sense. You see, there's a distinction between someone who is maybe physically, outwardly looked like someone who is part of God's people, but isn't, and someone who is truly from the heart, an Israelite.

There's a difference between someone who is perhaps circumcised in the flesh, but the Bible says circumcised by the heart is what God looks at. This is a passage that reminds us, right, it does not matter what it looks like on the outside.

Whether you go to church, whether you have done all the stuff, whether you know all the things to say, if you and I are apart from Christ in our hearts, we are far away from God.

[13:55] No amount of cutting, no good works, no religious practice can bridge that gap. And friends, once all of us were this way, all of us were separated from God and from each other.

But now, now, verse 13 says, and this is our second point, now the cross has brought you near, right? But now in Christ Jesus, verse 13 says, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. That's our second point, the cross has brought us near.

Such a good point, isn't it? This is such a rich truth. No other act in history leveled the playing field like what Jesus did when he shed his blood on the cross nearly 2,000 years ago.

Here was someone who was a card-carrying Jewish man, right? Physically descended from Abraham, never broke a rule, did everything right religiously, kosher all his life, and yet on the cross he was cut off, as it were, from God to draw people like you and me near.

[15:10] That is the gospel. And that is the gospel. And from verses 14 to 16, Paul is so amazed at this gospel, he piles on all the ways that the cross brings us near.

He starts in verse 14 strongly, for he himself is our peace, right? The Bible doesn't waste words. He himself, Jesus, no one else is our peace. Turn to no one else for your peace.

And note he doesn't say your peace, right, as if it's only for one group of people. He says our peace. Jesus is our peace. The blood of Christ is our peace that covers Jews and Gentiles, Kiwis and Asians.

Where there was once a dividing wall of hostility between people, Jesus dies at the cross, hands outstretched, and he declares peace, be still.

Friends, Paul is fixed on this theme so much that through this section, I want you to notice, if you read through this section, notice how he switches from peace to hostility, right?

[16:12] And then making peace in verse 15 and then he talks about putting to death hostility in the very next verse and then peace again in verse 17. Peace from hostility is on Paul's mind. Why does he emphasize this?

Well, I mean, we don't fully know, to be honest. Reading a letter like the Ephesians, it's like hearing a phone call from one side. We know what Paul's saying to the Ephesians.

We don't know what's going on in the Ephesians totally. We don't know what exactly the hostility was that may have been in the Ephesian churches. Just like I don't know all the hostility that has been simmering or growing here at PCBC over 29 years.

But I'm sure there's something and I'm sure as there was something in the Ephesian church and we do know this that the only possible solution for hostility is the peacemaking Messiah, Jesus.

Amen? Only he himself, Jesus himself can be our peace. Peace with God and peace with each other.

[17:22] I don't know if you've studied World War I history before. Some of you may have heard this story actually how in the first year of World War I Christmas came along and German and French troops in the First World War they called a truce.

Okay? And it was called the Christmas truce because here were two opposing armies shooting each other to death just days earlier and then around Christmas they just stopped and then decided oh, it's Christmas time why don't we just get out and then actually physically got out and played soccer together they exchanged gifts you know they helped each other to bury some of the people it was remarkable, right?

Here were people who were shooting each other just days before and then now they're mingling in no man's land and almost living out a remarkable picture of peace. But of course they had to go back eventually and the war had to continue.

But the peace of Christ that Paul talks of here goes so much further than just a couple of days truce over Christmas. Okay? The kind of peace that Christ brings doesn't just make two sides play soccer and then keep shooting each other.

Christ is not just a peace negotiator between people who can't get along. Alright? He's not just trying to patch up political problems or national ones or ethnic ones.

[18:39] Right? What is his purpose? Look at verse 15. Right? His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two.

This is a far bigger goal. This is much more than just trying to keep two sides from finding each other. He's trying to build a new people of God. Who are the people of God?

Jesus says now it is no longer about whether you have a certain bloodline or if you follow certain regulations. the Messiah has come to abolish all that it says here.

In Jesus himself there is one new humanity. That's how we should think of ourselves. Jews who are enemies have been reconciled to God. Gentiles who are enemies have been also reconciled to God.

And that is how we are reconciled to each other. Christ is our peace. Verse 16 says by putting to death literally killing the hostility through his own blood.

[19:37] That's the kind of peace I think that only Jesus can bring. We need to know that. That is the kind of peace that our hurting and divided world needs right now. At the cross two groups can become one.

So praise God. Praise God that although we were once far off from God and from each other because of the cross every one of us can be fellow citizens in God's kingdom with people brothers

and sisters who also hope in Christ.

Christ. Because maybe you're here and you've tried to fit in to a culture all your life. Might not be Jewish culture certainly but some kind of culture right? Maybe your life revolves around whether people like you or not.

What we chase for right? And we never reach whether it's through cutting or good works whatever it looks like. Maybe you try to fight for a cause and yet and yet you don't truly fit.

and yet you find no lasting peace because well you can't. You can't. Peace is only found in a relationship with Jesus Christ the peacemaker.

[20 : 44] All the ways that you have tried to find peace in this life can never give you the peace from hostility friend that Jesus offers through his death on the cross for you. So can I encourage you if you've never trusted Jesus for peace right?

If you're just sitting here trying to be anxious or trying to solve it through your own efforts turn from that. Turn from it. Put your hope in the Prince of Peace Jesus. Put your hope in him.

He died and rose again to be our peace and your peace too. And PCBC if Jesus is peace then I think those of us who are willing to carry his cross to follow him need to embody and live out that peace right?

To display to the world that we are one in Christ. That the gospel should unite us in Christ not divide us. We'll talk about this very soon. But Paul knows this right?

I think that's why he bangs on about this topic. And in the second half of this letter right? From chapters 4 through 6 he's going to go into a lot of practical detail about the kinds of actions that those who inherit Christ's kingdom those who are part of his peacemaking agenda are going to live out.

[21 : 57] things like how we live use our time how we talk to one another he gets practical and we'll get into that then but for now in this passage I think Paul is preparing the soil of our hearts preparing our hearts to receive and do those things and so our third point is that Paul wants us to remember what we now share in Christ because before we're going to be motivated to act in ways that are peacemaking we need to remember what we now share in Christ we need to remember how far from each other and from God we were yes how the cross draws us near yes but we need to remember that we share things together in Jesus Christ because it's so easy to think I'm me they're them we're in different groups but we need to remember what we share in Christ and I think there's three things he brings up from verses 17 to 22 so I'll share them briefly and I think as we see them three things we need to remember if we want to live out

God's vision as a peacemaking unified church firstly remember we have shared access to God right have a look at verse 17 he came and preached peace to you who are far away and peace to those who are near for through him we both have access to the father by one spirit here Paul is borrowing words from the prophet Isaiah who records how hundreds of years before Jesus was born God tells those who are humble and contrite he says this Isaiah 57 verse 19 I've seen their ways but I will heal them I will guide them and restore comfort to Israel's mourners creating praise on their lips peace peace to those far and near you see that you see that language says the Lord God and I will heal them Isaiah predicts that through the servant king that he talks about and describes the Lord God is on a peace mission he declares peace to those far and near and if that's true then that should drive our mission as a church should it not

I mean isn't that amazing I mean maybe you feel a little bit embarrassed maybe some of you are here and you feel embarrassed that half of our church family don't speak English right maybe you felt like you don't really want to invite friends to church because there's posters in Chinese all over the world building or that you might have to wear a mask some weeks or that maybe if they join the church they'll have to get someone to translate for them sometimes can I say this can we not be embarrassed about our church's Chinese heritage right because we have shared access to God right our parents share the same access as we do through the spirit remember God has opened the way to him for far and near east and west he is in the business of drawing first generation Chinese people and second generation Chinese people too he's in the business of drawing Chinese looking people who don't speak Chinese at all to Jesus he's drawing all kinds of people and I look around and perhaps everyone here has black hair and I say praise God for that right praise God that he even wants us to become part of his family praise God that Jesus proclaimed peace to us too we have the same access praise God for that he's used our church to bring people to

Christ that others could not so praise God for that so don't be ashamed don't be ashamed of our heritage and yet if we have shared access to God then don't be apathetic either right don't be apathetic because of our Chinese heritage because God as I told us is in the business of bringing those far and those near every nation he is drawing near to God the gospel we preach here is good for Kiwi Asians it's good for overseas students it's good for our Kiwi work colleagues it's good for our Indian neighbor it's good for everyone and if we're in English service that's good for 9 out of 10 people here in New Zealand so let's take that message of Christ to those who are near and those who are far let's not freak out about inviting our Kiwi friends our South African colleagues maybe those in our lives who are Indian or Filipino Maori Pacifica anyone everyone into our lives to see what Christ is doing the peace project he is building he has shared access to him to everyone and friends so should we here at

PCBC so first remember what we share access to God through Jesus it's so important to remember that secondly remember that we share citizenship in Christ have a look at verse 19 to 20 consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens of God's people and members of God's household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone what a glorious reality isn't it Jesus as we sang Christ alone cornerstone the early apostles and prophets they preached this good news build your life on Christ the cornerstone not anything else as a result we are fellow citizens with the saints we are now part of the same household and if we share citizenship in Christ with one another with our friends and family in PCBC English then perhaps we need to think and act outside any other dividing walls between us because here we are not just English versus Canto we're not just Honky versus Kiwi let's drop that name calling let's drop that us versus them we share

[27 : 51] Christ we share citizenship in Christ did you know that? did you remember that? when you have a disagreement with someone from another congregation or another group let's remember we share citizenship in Christ maybe we need to repent on some of the ways we have actually socially distanced ourselves from others in this church right?

or maybe even start by not just thinking of yourselves as only high schoolers or working age or uni students because we share the same father we share citizenship in Christ so what would they look like for you to live that out maybe it means praying for those in other cell groups maybe it's making friends with someone from another service maybe it's making English service itself a place where we can invite others all ages all ethnicities to come share in Christ's citizenship together how sad would it be if people came and visited and went away and said well my workplace is friendlier than this church how sad would it be if people came and they left and they said oh there's a couple of clicks here I don't feel like I can break into these groups no one should feel that way here at PCBC if we are citizens in Christ we do not click together we welcome the newcomer we're okay if groups change and we welcome new friends into our lives we embrace each other despite our differences I'm not saying that you stop being who God's made you I'm not saying that you stop hanging out with people who are like you no one can change the way you're shaped in life I can't stop being a Chinese Malaysian who grew up in Auckland and speaks Mandarin like a nine year old boy that's part of who I am but in Christ those things do not define me they don't divide me from you think that way remember in Christ we are citizens together of the kingdom of him let that flow into your actions who you choose to hang out with who you choose to make friends with finally right last two verses Paul Paul reckons it would do us good to remember not just shared access not just shared citizenship but also our shared blueprint he leaves this one here for the architects right in him the whole building verse 21 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 what an amazing picture right verses 21 to 22 Paul he starts speaking like an architect he gives an amazing description of like a temple a structure and this is what church is it's not just a bunch of Jews and Gentiles meeting in little homes right outnumbered in the city around them it's so much more than that we are like a building project that God has committed to finishing joined together he says rising to become a holy temple in the Lord this is such a powerful metaphor it's such a powerful medal for us too I think I mean back in the day the Ephesians readings would have been floored by Paul saying something like this because once upon a time they lived right in the shadow of a temple like this right over over the weekend we played a board game called seven wonders I don't know if you played that before and each of them you know each person picks up a wonder card and you're trying to build wonders and one of them is actually this one this is the

temple of

Artemis it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world because it was huge it was amazing thousands of people flocked to this temple to worship the Greek goddess Artemis to get favor from her surely if there was a more impressive holy temple in the ancient world this would be it right this is what the earlier Christians were living under and yet in the next slide you see this is the temple today right still there in modern Turkey but just one and a half columns remain this is what happens to one of the seven wonders of the world and yet the church of Christ God's dwelling place his temple is still being built together this project is still going right there's columns in Korea there are pieces in China there is beautiful brickwork being put together by God in Iran and Indonesia all around the world in India tiles are being fixed up in

[32 : 32] Europe brothers and sisters are rising up like archers in Africa and even here in Auckland even here in this room God's building project is still going on it's not perfect we're not perfect perhaps there's pipes that need fixing cracks that need patching up and some days we will be discouraged because we look at our temple here and it doesn't seem as impressive as crowds at a pride parade or fans but one day soon God's temple his church is the one left standing filled with the spirit his people for his glory so let that encourage you let that help you to press on remember remember that we have shared access to God we are fellow citizens and we are God's building project his temple maybe that's a good enough reason for us to keep serving to keep worshipping men and women rich and poor whatever ethnicity young and old one in Christ shall we pray together

Father Lord we are your people but sometimes we feel very small and very weak would you remind us because we are forgetful that we are not defined by the clothes we wear the colour of our skin how old and young we are our education our background these things they're part of us but they do not matter most of all once we were separate from God you we were separate from others yet you have brought us near through Christ help us to remember that and that because we are one in Christ we have the same access we are fellow citizens we can love each other like that we can shape and change the culture of our church so that we become an amazing building project that you're building that welcomes people from all parts of life to know and love Jesus so help us in all that be with us be our architect as we embark on your building project I pray these things in Jesus precious name Amen