

**“A Spiritual Makeover”**  
**Household of Faith Sermon Series (on the Book of Ephesians #5)**  
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**First Presbyterian Church – Winston-Salem, NC**  
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**(Eph. 2:11-22)**

**Introduction.**

Have you seen these extreme makeover television shows? Sometimes the program involves transforming an old run down or out of date house into one that is a *Better Homes and Garden* showpiece. Architects and construction crews come in, the family moves out for a while, and a complete transformation takes place.

Other times the television show is a face and clothing makeover in which a person allows hairstylists, make-up artists and fashion consultants to give them and whole new look. I have to admit that the reaction of friends and family when they see the new house or the new person for the first time is pretty remarkable. Dramatic transformation can bring a dramatic reaction.

Did you hear the story about the old country farmer who decided to go to the big city for the first time with his wife and son? He drove the old truck into the city and pulled up to a new high rise hotel. The farmer turned to his wife and said, “Honey, you and Junior go take a look inside and see what this big building is all about. I’ll stay here and watch the truck.”

The woman and her son walked into the hotel, and their jaws dropped to the floor as they took in the dazzling spectacle that filled their eyes. They had never seen anything like it before. Glittering chandeliers, plush oriental rugs, bell hops running to and fro.

Just then, an old man shuffled by them and walked to the elevator. The doors opened, he walked in, and the doors closed behind him. The farmer’s wife wondered what happened to the old man. She had never seen an elevator before. Suddenly, the doors opened again, and a handsome, muscular looking young man came walking out.

The farmer’s wife was amazed, and she turned to her son and said, “Junior, go get your daddy! They’ve got a miracle-transformation machine here in this place, and I want to see what it can do for him!”<sup>1</sup>

This morning we read of another makeover transformation, but it doesn’t have anything to do with physical appearance or home improvements. Rather, it’s a spiritual transformation of the heart.

## **I. The Portrait of Life Before Christ.**

Two weeks ago, we studied the first part of Ephesians 2, and we learned about Paul's analysis of the human condition as well as God's divine compassion. We saw how the apostle spelled out in detail the way in which apart from Christ you and I are dead in our sins, enslaved to our passions, and stand condemned before God. However, God in His mercy rescued us in Christ through His death on the cross.

In the passage before us today Paul goes on to make an even more penetrating analysis. Here he says that prior to God's transforming work by His Holy Spirit, there were 5 things that marked our lives.

- We were separated from Christ;
- We were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel;
- We were strangers to the covenant of promise;
- We were without hope; and
- We were without God.

That's a pretty stark analysis. William Hendriksen put it this way in his commentary: before we came to know Jesus, Paul says we were "Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless."<sup>2</sup> It's a discouraging portrait the apostle paints of humanity, but it's an accurate and honest picture.

Paul then goes on to talk at length about the problem of racism in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and he references the hostility that existed between Jews and Gentiles. This, too, was a part of the portrait of their lives before Christ. I think it's difficult for those of us who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to fully appreciate the profound division that existed between Jews and Gentiles back then. The closest we can come to it today is the racial division that exists between blacks and whites in our own country or perhaps what existed in South Africa in the last century.

Jewish people had a great deal of contempt for Gentiles. They thought that God created Gentiles simply to be fuel for the fires of hell, and they were prejudiced against all the other nations and peoples of the world. They thought that while God had made the other nations, in reality He only loved Israel.

It was unlawful for a Jew to help and Gentile woman who was in labor, because that would bring another Gentile into the world. The barrier between Jews and Gentiles was so absolute and unforgiving that if a Jewish boy or girl married a Gentile, the family would actually hold a funeral of that Jewish child. To them it was equivalent to a death in the family.<sup>3</sup>

This "wall of separation", this "dividing wall of hostility", as Paul calls it, also had a physical reminder, and it was a notable feature in the magnificent temple Herod the Great built in Jerusalem in 20 BC. The temple building itself was constructed on an elevated platform, and around it was the Court of the Priests.

East of this was the Court of Israel, and further east the Court of Women. These 3 courts were all on the same elevation as the temple itself.

However, from this level you descended 5 steps to a walled platform, and then on the other side of the wall 14 more steps to another wall, beyond which was the outer court. And this was called the Court of the Gentiles. From any part of it people who weren't Jewish could look up and see the temple, but they weren't ever allowed to approach it. They were cut off by a stone wall which was 9 feet high and 4 ½ feet thick. On the wall was displayed at various intervals warning signs in both Greek and Latin that "forbade any foreigner to enter under the pain of death."<sup>4</sup>

This was the kind of hostility that existed between Jews and Gentiles in Paul's day, and yet the apostle makes a remarkable statement in this passage. He says that in Christ this wall of separation has been broken down. What he means is that part of the transformation God wants to accomplish in the body of Christ is racial reconciliation.

He writes, "*But now in Christ Jesus 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...*" (2:13,14). These were revolutionary words to write back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, and they're still revolutionary today.

## **II. The Portrait of What Christ Has Done For Us.**<sup>5</sup>

Paul uses the word "remember" twice in this passage – in verses 11 and 12. And it carries the sense in which we remember the past in order to bring it to the present. If we ever forget what God has done for us in Christ, we will fail to have as deep an appreciation for the death of Jesus on the cross as we should. And the result is that we will tend to excuse the sin in our lives, such as the sin racial prejudice. In His great mercy, God made us alive in Christ, He reconciled us to Himself, and He brought about the possibility of reconciliation with other people who are very different from us.

There are 3 things Paul says about what Christ has done for us in this passage. **First**, he says **Christ abolished the law**. This refers to the *ceremonial law* of the OT that required circumcision of Jewish boys and men, dietary restrictions, and rules regarding social relationships. Paul says these matters which erected a barrier between Jews and Gentiles were set aside by Jesus when He died on the cross. And the reason is because none of these things can earn the grace and love of God.

The **second** thing Paul says Jesus has done for us is that **He created a single new humanity**. Jews and Gentiles, who were alienated from one another have been brought together into one new humanity by the sacrifice of Jesus, and we've been united together in His Body, the Church.

The **final** thing Paul says Christ did was **bring about the reconciliation of both Jews and Gentiles to God**. The word “hostility” in this passage refers both to our hostility toward God and our hostility toward one another. Christ is our peace, and He proclaimed a message of reconciliation. And you and I are invited to join Him in this ministry of reconciliation and overcome our prejudice.

### **III. The Portrait of What We’re To Become.**

The final portrait Paul paints recognizes that you and I live somewhere in between the old and the new – what we were and what we shall fully be sometime in the future when Christ comes again. In the meantime, Paul says we’re supposed to be God’s new society in the world here and now. We’re to present an alternative picture to a watching world of what God’s love looks like in the midst of the fallen and broken world we live in. And we’re to live counter-culturally to the rest of humanity and resist the old patterns of hate and hostility that are so easy to give into.

There are three metaphors Paul uses to describe this new society. **First**, he says **we’re to be God’s kingdom here on earth**. Before, the Gentiles were viewed as foreigners and excluded from citizenship in Israel. But now he says “*you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people*” (19). The kingdom of God is not an earthly place; it’s a heavenly realm. And everyone who has given their life to Christ is now a citizen of the kingdom of God, regardless of their residence here on earth. Paul was writing at a time when the Roman Empire was at its zenith, yet he sees another kingdom at work which is international, interracial, and more enduring than any earthly empire has been or every will be. You and I belong to that kingdom.

**Second**, Paul says that **we’re also members of God’s family or household**. A kingdom is one thing, but a family is another. In Christ, you and I have been adopted by God the Father, and we’re brothers and sisters in Christ who belong to the family of God. Just as you and I didn’t get to pick who would be in our earthly families, we don’t get to pick who is in the family of God either. And one of the measures of our discipleship is how well we learn to love and get along with our brothers and sisters in Christ even when we’re different, even when it’s tough.

The **final metaphor** Paul uses is that of **God’s temple**. He says that Christ is the cornerstone and you and I are living stones that are being fitted together into a building in which the Spirit of God dwells. Some version of the Jewish temple stood in Jerusalem for nearly a thousand years, and it was the focal point of Israel’s identity as the people of God until it was destroyed in 70 AD. However, God has made a new spiritual temple, and we are the living stones that comprise it. God can’t be contained in a physical structure or a localized geography. He lives in and

through us by His Holy Spirit, and wherever we go, He goes. God dwells in a temple made of living stones that's on the move for Christ.

### **Conclusion.**

This is the portrait of the new humanity Paul paints in Ephesians 2. It's a call to reconciliation, and it's a call to transformation and it requires a spiritual makeover. Whatever stands between us and other believers, whether it is race or other expressions of things that divide us, needs to be gone. What has historically divided people needs to be broken down in the Christian community.

Many of us here today think that racial reconciliation isn't something we need to deal with personally. We consider ourselves pretty tolerant people who are affirming of minorities. But the problems of race in this city and around this country are serious and deep, and I suspect each of us here today has more room to grow in overcoming prejudice than we realize. And I also believe we need to become more involved personally in being a part of the solution and not a just part of the problem.

This passage has profound meaning for me personally, having grown up in Atlanta in the 1950s and 1960s. Racial reconciliation is a calling in Christ I feel deeply because I saw the effects of racism and hatred when I was growing up. I was a part of the court-ordered bussing in Atlanta to integrate the schools in the late 60s. And the racial problems we've seen in this country in recent years makes us realize it's still a huge problem today, and every Christian needs to pray and to work for reconciliation.

As I close I want to give you a picture of what this looks like in real life. It's a picture of people who didn't just think about the problem, and they didn't just talk about it. They actually did something about it. In his book, *Rumors of Another World*, Philip Yancey writes that a few hours south of Atlanta, off state highway 19, in the flat red-clay fields of Sumter County, a Baptist preacher name Clarence Jordan and his wife Florence tried to live out the truths Paul wrote about in Ephesians 2.

Clarence took the New Testament seriously, and he believed that Jesus meant what He said when He told His disciples, "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*" As a result, he started a community called Koinonia Farm in which men and women from any race or socioeconomic background could live together and voluntarily share their income as well as property ownership.

Ideals such as these didn't sit well in rural Georgia in the 1950s and 1960s. "Communists" and "the-n-word-lovers" were two of the mildest epithets hurled their way. When Clarence Jordan sponsored two black students to enroll in a state college in 1956, just two years after the Supreme Court ruled against segregated education, opposition to Koinonia Farm began in earnest. They found their fences

periodically cut, garbage scattered on their property, sugar poured in their gas tanks, and crops vandalized. Signs advertising the farm's roadside market disappeared from the highways.

Soon vandalism turned to violence. The Ku Klux Klan made explicit threats. Bombs badly damaged the roadside market, and bullets were fired at farmhouses. Then a local boycott took effect, making it impossible for the Koinonia Farm to get its cotton processed or its crops sold. Vandals destroyed beehives, and they chopped down nearly 300 apple, peach, and pecan trees.

Friends and supporters urged the community to relocate, but they stayed put. Florence said, "We knew we wouldn't be the first Christians to die, and we wouldn't be the last." A mail-order business enabled them to stay financially afloat, and a catalog for pecan products urged sympathetic buyers, "Help us ship the nuts out of Georgia!"

Clarence Jordan, who had a PhD in NT Greek, had to keep reminding the Koinonia community that citizens in God's kingdom have different weapons in their arsenal. The Christian fights with the weapons of love, peace, prayer, service, and goodwill, which at the time seemed impotent against bombs, bullets, and boycotts. He believed the best proof of the reality of the unseen world is the evidence of transformed lives in this world.

Lives did change, and Jordan's influence continues to this day even though he died in 1969. He impacted a peanut farmer that lived nearby named Jimmy Carter, who went on to become governor of Georgia and then president of the United States. And Millard Fuller, one of Koinonia's members, at Jordan's urging sold his law practice, gave away his money, and founded Habitat for Humanity, which has since built more than 800,000 houses for needy people around the world.<sup>6</sup>

You and I may not be able to have an impact on breaking down the walls of racial hostility like Clarence and Florence Jordan did, but each of us can decide that we're going to live counter to the culture of racial hate around us. We can try to build bridges of understanding with people who are very different from us, and we can make a difference right where we are. How does God want you to pursue racial reconciliation in your own life and in the world? Where do the walls of prejudice need to come down in your own heart? And how will you help build the kingdom of God, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free? Pray about this, and do something about it in the coming week.

Transformation begins with a first step.

There are some folks in our congregation who are taking this challenge seriously. Perhaps a first step you can take is to find out what the Justice in Jesus Sunday School class is up to. And also, learn about the work of the Downtown Committee of Session. They are all wrestling earnestly with this matter of racial reconciliation.

May each of us seek to be about the Lord's work in the Lord's way for the Lord's glory? It might just lead to an extreme spiritual makeover in your life, in our church, and in our city. May it be so, Lord. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Source unknown.

<sup>2</sup> William Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from William Barclay, *Ephesians*, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XV. 11.5.

<sup>5</sup> Much of this section has been adapted from John Stott, *Ephesians*, pp. 99-103.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World*, pp. 234-237.