

## STEP THREE: From Hostility to Peace in One New Man

Ephesians 2:11-18

Social exclusion.<sup>i</sup>

Marginalization.

Segregation

Racial injustice

Alienation

Disenfranchisement

Outcasts

What do all these terms mean?

They all describe something that happens when some people (who have more access and power) identify other people (with less access and power) as different, and therefore because they are different, they are to be sectioned off, segregated, and excluded in some way.

In Jesus' day, if you were a Samaritan, if you were a Gentile, if you were a leper, you were avoided, ignored, excluded. They didn't visit where you lived. They wouldn't drink from your cup or eat food from your plates. They had no interest in any kind of a relationship with you.

In India, if you are one of the *Dalits*, an *Untouchable*, you are considered someone a polluter of society. The same with the *Burakumin* of Japan, or the *Baekjeong* of Korea or the *Ragyabpa* of Tibet or the *Al-akhdam* in Yemen.

For too long in the United States, if your skin was dark brown or black, you were often excluded in thousands of ways, and by hundreds of laws.<sup>ii</sup> In sections of our country, even in major cities, you were told where you could live or not live, what schools you could and could not attend, whom you could marry or not marry, what motels were off-limits, what cafes you could not frequent, what drinking fountains you could or could not use, what restrooms were not yours and which ones were. If you took public transportation, you had to sit in the back. Depending on your skin color, you were either pulled over and given a warning...or you were pulled over and jailed.

Even churches claiming to love God and follow Jesus followed suit.<sup>iii</sup> Some welcomed everyone, while others made sure social and racial dividing walls were not only erected, but maintained.

To deny these realities is to deny the truth. But not just here and not too long ago. The history of humanity – in virtually any society in every country -- is covered over with discrimination, inclusion and exclusion. Our world has always had its “insiders” and “outsiders.”

Does God care about these things? Let me be more specific.

- ✓ Does it matter to God that too often spiritual insiders have labeled others spiritual “outsiders,” who don’t truly belong in God’s family?
- ✓ Does it matter to God that when insiders simply don’t want outsiders let in?
- ✓ Does it matter to Him when all the advantages that might help other people come into God’s family are withheld? Hoarded? Not eagerly offered to those “outside?”
- ✓ Does it matter to God when insiders don’t love outsiders?
- ✓ Does it matter to God that spiritual insiders need to get over being “insiders” and start sharing His heart for any and every human being no matter whether they are far from God or close to God?

I mean, does God care about the divide? The distance? The discrimination? Is He bothered about the walls that keep people from Him and distanced from one another? If He does care, what has He done about it?

Eph 2:11 Therefore **remember** that **at one time** you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called “the circumcision,” which is made in the flesh by hands—<sup>12</sup> **remember** that you were **at that time** separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now *in Christ Jesus* you who once were far off have been brought near *by the blood of Christ*.

<sup>14</sup> For *he himself is our peace*, who has made us both **one** and has broken down *in his flesh* the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that **he might create in himself one new man** in place of the two, so **making peace**, <sup>16</sup> and **might reconcile us both to God in one body** through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

<sup>17</sup> And *he came and preached peace* to you who were far off and **peace** to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For *through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father*.

How does this revelation from the Spirit of God answer our questions about insiders and outsiders?

**DIVISION AND DISTANCE ARE HISTORY**  
(insider/outsider, inclusion/exclusion) **BECAUSE**  
**IN CHRIST WE ALL TOGETHER ARE ONE NEW MAN**

Of course, the truths of these verses depend on what we’ve already learned from Ephesians Ephesians 2:1-7 No matter who you are, where you come from, if you’re in the human race, we all began in spiritual deadness before God...and the only way for that to change is for a merciful, loving,

and gracious God to give us life. To raise each one of us from **death to life** in Christ.

Ephesians 2:8-10 Not only does God raise us from death to life, but He is a craftsman in our lives to save us **by grace but also FOR goodness**. We are brought to life in Christ Jesus, and we are crafted for good works in Christ Jesus.

From death to life, by grace for goodness. But here's the question. What kind of group are we?

When God gives us life in Christ, by grace through faith, and creates us for good works, do we carry in all the old stuff, the walls, the divisions, the discrimination and distance. Or has God done something new? Please notice that Paul acknowledges, first...

### **#1 There has been division and distance between people**

Ephesians 2:11-12

Please notice, Paul begins with the “outsiders.”

Eph 2:11 Therefore **remember** that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called “the circumcision,” which is made in the flesh by hands—<sup>12</sup> **remember** that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers (i.e., foreigners) to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Someone has said, “There are two kinds of people in the world

- ✓ Those for whom the glass is half-full, and those for whom the glass is half empty
- ✓ Those who make your life harder, and those who make your life easier
- ✓ Those who simplify and those who complicate

For many centuries, and certainly in the early days of the Christian movement, especially for Jews, there were two kinds of people in the world. There was first and foremost “the circumcision,” that is, the spiritual “insiders” -- the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons. Then, there was the rest of humanity, “the uncircumcision,” the outsiders. You were, it was thought, either much closer to God because you were Jewish, because your males had received the sign of God’s covenant in their flesh (circumcision). Furthermore, you knew from the revelation you possessed from God that

- Your Messiah and the world’s future king were to be born in YOUR nation, someone from the Jewish tribe of Judah and in the line of King David
- You had citizenship (and therefore special rights) in Israel
- You had special promises from God, his covenants of blessing
- You had hope in this difficult world because of the true God’s promises and presence

You knew that the true God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, **was your God**, that He had

chosen Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's descendants...and thus you were the "ultimate insiders."

On the other hand, the Gentiles were on the outside. God had not chosen them. God had not insisted that they be circumcised. They had no messiah to look forward to, no citizenship with God's people, no covenants of promise or blessing.

And, quite frankly, the insiders were just fine being on the inside and leaving all the rest on the outside. And Paul says to the Gentiles, "Remember this. You really were on the outside looking in." For the most part, it was true. Most Gentiles didn't care that God had chosen Israel. Romans 1 reminds us that the unbelieving, unthankful, unregenerate world of men are just fine denying what the true God has revealed and coming up with their own religions. Paul said to the philosophers in Athens, "You've got a statue for every god conceivable...but actually you have no accurate idea about the true God, who cannot be contained in a temple made with hands." You're way off the mark.

Here Paul says, "remember when you were on the outside."

By the way, do you have a "I remember when I was on the outside" story? You should. In fact, you should have it memorized, ready on the tip of your tongue. Paul himself did.

<sup>1</sup> Timothy 1:13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent (or, *violent aggressor* NASV). But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Your kids need to hear your "I was on the outside" story. Your grandkids. Your neighbor-friend. Your associate at work. The guys you coach with, fish with. The gals you work out with. "There was a time when I had no hope; I was without God in this world." But now...

## #2 Division and distance are gone because of the blood of Christ

Ephesians 2:13-15a

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For he himself is our **peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down *in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility*  
<sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances,

Notice carefully that we are brought near to God and to one another by **the blood of Christ**. What does that mean?

It means that not just anyone could die for sins. It had to be THE promised Messiah of Israel.

It had to be THE innocent lamb of God who could take away the sin of the world. His innocent blood, his sacrificed life, his death for every person's sin alone satisfied satisfy the holy justice and righteousness of God. By his blood, any and every believing person can be forgiven, can be cleansed of sin and brought near to God.

But something else happens too. He Himself becomes our peace by abolishing ("destroying") any wall of former hostility that divided and distanced people. Harold Hoehner writes, "Because of what Christ did on the cross, there is peace between Jews and Gentiles in this new union." Then he adds, "Much had to be dismantled for this peace to **be a reality**. The LAW which was so important to the Jew could no longer be the operating principle, otherwise, the old rift would reappear."<sup>iv</sup>

Please let that soak in a minute. Think about what was going through a devout Jew's head. "The LAW no longer the operating principle? The LAW no longer required to shape my life, my relationships, my attitudes, who I associate with and who I don't? Are you kidding me!!? The Law has ALWAYS been *my* operating principle. I've lived my whole life either making friends or keeping my distance based on whether or not someone honored and kept the Law. That's gone? Abolished? Destroyed? Who says?" The crucified Lord Jesus Christ. His sacrificed flesh. His forgiving blood.

- "We have the law, you don't!" *It doesn't matter. Christ died for us and brought us all near.*
- "We have a spiritual history, you don't!" *It doesn't matter. Christ died for us and brought us all near.*
- "We're American citizens; you're not!" *It doesn't matter. Christ died for us and brought us all near.*
- "We've got white skin. We've got black skin! We have brown skin! You don't!" *It doesn't matter, Christ died for us and brought us all near.*
- "I'm Republican Red. I'm Democratic Blue!" *It doesn't matter. Christ died for us and brought us all near.*
- "I've got a Ph.D. and you don't!" *It doesn't matter. Christ died for us and brought us near.*
- "I live in this neighborhood. I live in that neighborhood. I make this much. You make that much!" *It doesn't matter. Christ died for us and brought us all near.*

In Christ, our operating principles – the law-like demands and perspectives we may hold and even may require of others or we would not associate with them or accept them or love them -- all got wiped out at the cross. The dividing walls of hostility and demands and discrimination are now gone IN CHRIST. God, Paul eagerly writes, has a

**#3 God's reconciliation plan is creating ONE NEW MAN  
(marked by **peace**) in Christ Jesus**  
Eph. 2:15b-18

that **he might create *in himself* one new man** in place of the two, so **making peace**,<sup>16</sup> and **might reconcile us both to**

**God in one body** through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and **preached peace** to you who were far off and **peace** to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in **one** Spirit to the Father.

Did you notice verse 17? The Lord Jesus has the same message for those who may think they are far from God and those who think they are near to God. If you are far away from God because for most of your life you couldn't have cared less about God's holiness and the righteous demands of his Law...or if you have thought yourself close to God because you tried (and failed) to keep the righteous demands of His Law – both groups, and all people everywhere need to hear Jesus' preaching.

**Matthew 11:28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."v

What has God done about the divisions, the distance, the social exclusion and segregation? What is God's plan for offering a solution to racial injustice, alienation and disenfranchisement?

The first thing He has done-- and continues to do every day in this age of grace --is **to call anyone and everyone through the gospel of His grace** out of marching along with a spiritually dead, perpetually disobedient world and **into** Jesus' resurrection life, **into** Christ Jesus' ONE NEW MAN. There is where peace with God and with one another is to be found. There is where all hostilities and walls and barriers are taken away. To be sure, Jesus' disciples may be able, as the world's salt and light, to have a reforming voice calling the world to treat all made in God's image with respect and justice. The Spirit does empower us to shine in that way. But **our primary message** is Ephesians 2:1-10, and **the primary place** where peace and joy and brotherhood is found and experienced is this ONE NEW MAN in which we all have access to the Father through one Spirit.

**DIVISION AND DISTANCE ARE HISTORY  
(insider/outsider, inclusion/exclusion) BECAUSE  
IN CHRIST WE ALL TOGETHER ARE ONE NEW MAN**

May I offer several ways to personally apply this important passage of Scripture? 4 questions -

#1 Are you and I prepared to share our  
"I remember when I was on the outside" story?

It could well be your most effective *sharing the gospel* tool.

#2 Do have any “I’m an insider, they are outsiders” **attitudes you’ve brought into** the body of Christ? Some perspective, some prejudice, any attitudes to dismantle?

Those all should have died when the flesh of Jesus Christ died on the cross.

#3 Are we aware that every Sunday, **God brings near “outsiders” who wonder** if they truly belong, or are welcomed here, as insiders?

When we communicate, overtly or subtly, that the only people who belong in this group of Jesus’ disciples, are those who agree with us politically, or are equal with us economically, or are the same as us culturally...we are *completely* out of bounds. In fact, we should more diligently express these are NOT what matters. The ONLY issue that matters here, at Christ Community Church is this – Has Jesus Christ died for you and offered you His forgiveness and life.

#4 In our interactions when others about the social and justice problems our country is wrestling with, **is what Jesus Christ has done**, His death for all – insiders and outsiders – and His invitation to believe, raised to life, and put in His body, on His team...is that **on your lips**? Are we ready to share it? Ready to lovingly invite others to the cross...and into His family?

C’mom...let’s put first things first, and BE the Lord Jesus Christ’s ONE NEW MAN.

Copyright 2020 © David A. Staff  
All rights reserved

---

<sup>i</sup> Social exclusion, marginalization or social marginalization is the social disadvantage and relegation to the fringe of [society](#). It is a term used widely in [Europe](#) and was first used in [France](#). It is used across disciplines including [education](#), [sociology](#), [psychology](#), [politics](#) and [economics](#). Social exclusion is the process in which individuals are blocked from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group, and which are fundamental to social integration and observance of human rights within that particular group. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_exclusion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_exclusion)

<sup>ii</sup> Called “Jim Crow” legislation.

<sup>iii</sup> Jonathan Alter, “When Jimmy Carter Was Silent on Civil Rights,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 19-20, 2020, C4. Alter reviews Carter’s early political years (1960’s) when as a southern politician in Georgia, he “concealed his support for integration to protect his business and his political prospects.” To his credit, in 1965 Carter did oppose a “resolution in his local Baptist church that prevented Blacks from setting foot inside.” But, as Alter reports from having interviewed Carter, “more often, he was the kind of person Dr. King had in mind when he wrote his 1963 ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail,’ that “the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom” is not the Ku Klux Klansman ‘but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice’.”

<sup>iv</sup> Harold W. Hohner, *Ephesians; An Exegetical Commentary*, 366.

<sup>v</sup> Interestingly enough, Matthew records this all-comers invitation from Jesus after excoriating those who were near (i.e., Jewish people living in their towns and villages) for not responding to his miracles with faith in Him, remarking that if those who were far away (“those in Tyre and Sidon”) had seen his works, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. POINT: Those who think they are near can be actually far-away, and those far-away are actually closer. Cf. Matthew 11:20-24.