

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: From Outcasts to Citizens, Ephesians 2:11-22

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INTRODUCTION: Have you ever been somewhere and felt like an outcast? Have you ever traveled somewhere and felt like you did not belong there? Have you ever been in a social setting and been uncomfortable? Well, if so, then you are normal. If you've never felt that way, perhaps you can give the rest of us some tips.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he reminded the church people they were once outcasts, but now they were citizens of God's kingdom. They had been included where they once would have been excluded.

My four points are as follows:

1. Paul reminded people they were once outcasts.
2. Paul clarified Christ was the unifier.
3. Christian citizenship is for all believers.
4. Christian citizenship has a purpose.

First, PAUL REMINDED PEOPLE THEY WERE ONCE OUTCASTS.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2: 11-13 ¹¹ *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands) — 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. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

EXPLANATION: Circumcision of males was a distinctly Jewish practice. I've studied this issue for years, and as I've told you before, I really don't understand what circumcision had to do with anything other than in the Old Testament; God required it of men if they were to be his people.

In the male dominated world of the Old Testament, men were either part of the group of the circumcised, or they were not. They were either God's men or not. And what determined this was circumcision. As for the women, there was a dividing line—if they were God's women, they had to be related to one of the circumcised men. There were a few exceptions along the way, like Rahab for instance, who was adopted into the family of faith. If any men were adopted into the family of faith, they would have been circumcised.

If you look at the maps in the back of your Bible, you'll probably see an area known today as Turkey. Ephesus was near the West Coast and far from any Jewish concentration of people. Paul reminded them there was a time when they were not part of the family of faith and had no possibility of becoming part of that family. They were completely spiritually lost in this world—just a group of people living life day to day with no hope for anything, really. But, because of Christ, they were included.

Once again, we have a repeating theme with the Apostle Paul—the theme of what was once separate now becoming one and the same. Paul tells us none of it was meant for us originally. God chose his people to accomplish his will in this world. He told them to bless other nations. Sometimes they did, and sometimes they did not. When Jesus came, circumcision no longer mattered, as Paul clearly states in other parts of scripture. Notice above, how he makes a point to say circumcision is accomplished by human hands. Throughout the New Testament, Paul completely exposes the acts of the flesh as being completely futile, and he completely devours even fleeting ideas about how we can save ourselves through works.

Paul's reminder to the Church at Ephesus was timely. Later on this church would be one of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation Chapter Two as the church who had abandoned its first love. Paul's letter to them was an interesting foreshadowing of things to come.

APPLICATION: Occasionally we need reminders of what we once were without Christ. It's not something for us to dwell on, but it is something for us to be aware of. And, if you came to Christ at a young age, you need an occasional reminder of the life from which he has saved you.

If we are not careful, we could become like the people in the church at Ephesus—well meaning but rather confused, thinking our works and actions save us while abandoning our first love, which is simply salvation in Christ Jesus alone.

APPLICATION: Paul’s reminder to the people of the Ephesus church should have humbled them as well. Those people, who were once outcasts, were now on equal terms with all believers. So, let us be regularly reminded and humbled at the fact God has included all believers in the family of faith. Where would I be without him? I have no idea where I’d be.

Paul reminded the people they were once outcasts, and—

Second, PAUL CLARIFIED THAT CHRIST WAS THE UNIFIER.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2: 14-18 ¹⁴ *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,* ¹⁵ *by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,* ¹⁶ *and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.* ¹⁷ *He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.* ¹⁸ *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

EXPLANATION: Through Jesus, there are no longer Jews and Gentiles— just followers of Christ. Notice the words “peace” and “hostility.” The barrier between the Jews, also known as the circumcised, and the Gentiles, also known as the uncircumcised, was hostile.

Even the newest student of the Bible will know how the hostilities of the barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles carried over into New Testament times, and even into today. But with Paul’s letter to the Gentiles, he made clear Christ was the peacemaker between the two large divisions of people. In fact, he was such a peacemaker that because of him there were no longer two divisions.

ILLUSTRATION: As I’ve traveled, I’ve discovered on my own the unity found in Christ. I’ve met people from all walks of life in America and in a few places around the world who know the same Jesus Christ I know. A man from England spoke to

us on a Wednesday night about his work with global youth ministry. Because our time was limited, I gave him a very brief introduction of maybe one minute; then he stood up and talked about reaching young people around the world for Christ.

A few weeks later, he contacted me and asked if we could support some Christian youth leaders from hostile countries who wanted to get together for a rather clandestine conference of Christian fellowship and support. Some of you supported that effort. He sent me a couple of photos of the conference. You see, he and we have the same Savior, and therefore, long explanations were not necessary. We were already on the same wavelength of understanding.

ILLUSTRATION: In an unusual encounter in South America, a person in my group gave a man a Bible. I took another group to South America a year later and we saw the man who told us he'd been reading his Bible and had grown in his understanding of Jesus. He really had no idea who we were or where we were from. His understanding of the world outside the very small place he lived was very limited. But, that didn't matter to him or us. All we knew was we had something major in common; we had the same Savior and Lord.

Let's review: Paul reminded the church they were once outcasts, Christ was the unifier, and then he wrote —

Third, CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP IS FOR ALL BELIEVERS.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2: 19-22 ¹⁹ *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,* ²⁰ *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.* ²¹ *In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.* ²² *And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

EXPLANATION: Each country in the world has its own rules for citizenship. You may be born a citizen of a particular country, or you might choose to apply for citizenship as an act of your free will. Dual citizenship versus dual nationality is a complicated issue. But, all of that talk is about earthly citizenship. Paul's mention of citizenship is clearly about spiritual citizenship.

Notice in verse 19, the term “fellow citizens.” In English, it’s two words. In Greek, it’s only one word: *sumpolités* (soom-pol-ee'-tace) [συμπολίτης, ου, ό]. This verse is the only time this particular word is used in the Bible. It cannot mean “fellow” as a standalone word. It cannot mean “citizens” as a standalone word. What it means is literally “fellow- citizens.” If your s7665cripture doesn’t have a hyphen between the two words, put one.

The compound word “fellow-citizens” brings with it equality. When my children were baptized, I presented my daughter as “my daughter and now my sister in Christ” and each of my sons as “my son and now my brother in Christ.” You see, on the earthly side of things I am the father of three children, but on the spiritual side of things, because of Christ, I am their brother.

As fellow-citizens, there are no spiritual mothers or fathers. We might refer to the person who helped bring us to faith in Christ as our spiritual mother or father, but really that’s incorrect. As fellow-citizens, we are all equal. There is no hierarchy, and there are no super saints.

Furthermore, I may know people who are citizens of other nations, but they may be a foreigner to me and vice-versa from a political point of view. However, from a spiritual point of view, we are fellow-citizens of Heaven because of Christ.

Paul reminded the church they were once outcasts. Christ was the unifier, and citizenship was for all believers. And, last, Paul wrote—

Fourth, CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP HAS A PURPOSE.

Verse 19 tells us we are members of his household. “Household” in the original language literally means part of the family, not just a dweller. And this household was built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles. What does he mean by that? I believe what he means is the household was built upon the prophecies about the coming Christ and upon the teaching of the apostles. Their prophecies and teaching stemmed from Christ, the cornerstone.

As part of the family, we did not create the household of faith; it was built for us. Christ is using us to become the dwelling place of his spirit. It is a mind-blowing truth.

In this letter, Paul challenged people to remember where they'd come from and because of the direction they were going, to put their minds on heavenly things.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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