

**Ad-Mission: What if it's True?**  
*The Church Has Relevance for My Life*  
Ephesians

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**Introduction:**

Even in a postmodern culture, every individual knows that the world is not the way it is supposed to be or could be. In fact, every postmodern individual knows that their life is not the way it should be or could be. Every individual will admit that there are things they would like to change about their word and their life. That fact alone is sufficient ground for introducing and speaking about the topic and reality of sin. Where there is sin – a coming short of what ought to be – there is talk of change and pleas for help.

Even in a postmodern culture, there is the offer for help. There is counsel offered. The question we address this morning is this: Does the church have any relevance upon my life? Is the church a sufficient vehicle for bringing change to my life? Can the church offer the kind of help, the kind of counsel I need?

You are probably aware that there are more than 200 different and competing philosophies of psychological counsel available for today. David Powlison, a gifted philosopher, theologian and apologist within the counseling world offers a helpful structure. He says that all counseling systems are built upon four components:

1. Conceptual framework – defines norms, problems and solution.
2. Methodology – the motions of engaging in skillful, intentional conversation to remedy defined ills.
3. Social Structure – the environment that offers cure and care to people in need of help.
4. Apologetic – the defense of its own model and the critique of opposition models.

Now, I would sincerely love to turn this into an outline for a speech about the supremacy of my own system of counsel and begin to critique other models and set up an apologetic for the model that I think is best. For example, where would we go for establishing the conceptual framework for our counseling system? Where would we go to define norms, problems and solutions? It would be a supreme joy of mine to lift high the sufficiency of Scripture for addressing the soul of humankind; but that will come another day. I would love to speak of the methodology that works best for speaking change into the drama of each individual life; but that too will have to wait.

Instead, I want to address the social structure that is best suited for bringing lasting change and deepest healing to the hurts of humans. What venue is best equipped for offering you and me help? Is it to be found behind the closed doors of a doctor? Is it to be found on the couch of a psychotherapist? In what social structure are we to find the best environment for offering real and lasting change?

Every counseling model entails a “delivery system,” a social structure. Ideas and practices inhabit institutions. Concepts and methods comprise the knowledge and tools of professions and social systems. In modern America, for example, the “mental health system” is a vast complex of higher education, hospitals, publishers, third-party insurers, drug companies, licensing boards, and private practice psychotherapists. But the loving truth and truthful love that God offers to help the deepest hurts and most painful wounds of his people comes embedded in a different social system, namely, the *ekklesia* of the people of God – in the people of God assembled – in the people of God gathered – in the church! (Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes*, p.5).

The most magnificent institutional structure imaginable is a community living out the beauty of Ephesians 4 as they wed pastoral leadership with every-member mutuality; and as they wed pastoral leadership with every-member ministry. Christ's change agenda, the transformation of fallen humanity, drives both public and personal ministry.

So let's examine the church as a social structure, a delivery system, for bringing care and cure to the hearts of fallen humanity. I propose to you that the church is the only institution ordained by God for delivering counsel and producing change.

We have all heard, perhaps said, at one time or another the common phrase, "You have made your bed; now sleep in it." Do you recognize that? As Christians, I hope that we would be able to recognize how utterly opposed to the Gospel that sentence is. Can you hear the two lies that this sentence offers?

1. The first lie says, "The problems you have created are irreversible. You are stuck in your mess."
2. The second lie says, "You are alone in your problems. Do not even try to live out here with the rest of us who have never made mistakes and who have no problems."

These two lies tell people that if they have made mistakes, they need not expect help from anyone else. If there is going to be change, they are on their own to try and fix it.

The good news of the Gospel is that once Christ brings us as sinners into the family of God, we are never again alone. Yet many believers latch onto the hope of personal change while embracing the individualism of our society. We often adopt a kind of Jesus-and-me approach to personal change.

I have news for you this morning. God has a much bigger and messier plan for bringing about change in his people. Change is something God intends for his people to experience together. Change is a corporate goal. That which God does in each of us as individuals is only part of a much larger story of redemption that involves all of God's people through the ages. You are part of that story and part of that family.

Change within a community is the agenda God has for each of his people.

When the Apostle Paul was discipling new believers, he repeatedly reminded them that there was help in Christ and in Christ's people. Look at two passages where Paul encourages the church at Ephesus to think of themselves as a part of something new – something bigger.

### **Ephesians 2:11-22 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> 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 and 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. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the

cornerstone,<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.<sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

### An Estranged People

Q. How many different expressions are there in vv.11-13 that speak of an estranged relationship?

<sup>11</sup> 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

1. Called “Uncircumcision” by the “Circumcision.”
2. “Aliens” from the commonwealth of Israel.
3. “Strangers” from the covenants.
4. “Far off.”

Q. What was it that made them estranged?

“Strangers from the covenants (plural) of [one] promise (singular).”

Q. What are the covenants (plural) that are unique to the commonwealth of Israel?

- Abrahamic Covenant
- Mosaic Covenant
- Davidic Covenant

Q. What was the singular promise held in common with each of these covenants? Cf. Exodus 6:7

“I will be your God and you will be My People.”

Gentiles were without hope and without God because they were “outside” the covenant community, the “commonwealth of Israel.” They did not have the promise = no hope; They did not have God.

### A Reconciled People

<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

Q. With whom did Jesus make peace?

Those with whom the Gentiles were estranged – God and Israel.

<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 and 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.

Q. How was the reconciliation accomplished?

By the abolishing the hostility on two levels (vertical and horizontal)

<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 and 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.

1. He removed the wall of separation that kept the Gentiles at arms length from citizenship in the commonwealth – the hostility among men
2. He removed the enmity that the broken Law brought before God for all mankind - “far” or “near” – the hostility toward God

Q. What is the result of this reconciliation?

<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

1. Negatively – No longer estranged.
2. Positively – Fellow citizens of God’s household.

### A Functioning People

Q. What is the function of this people?

To become a sanctuary (“dwelling place”) for the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, **grows into a holy temple in the Lord**.<sup>22</sup>  
In him you also are being built together into a **dwelling place for God** by the Spirit.

The “whole Building” grows into the temple. This refers to the whole people – the universal church – the people of God in every place and in every time.

Q. What is the difference between v. 21 and v. 22? - If v. 21 refers to the “whole people” becoming a temple for the Lord then to whom does the “you also” refer?

1. To the Gentile church at Ephesus.
2. To the local church which is a reflection of the universal church.

Here is the central question to be asked from this text: Where does God dwell on earth? Or, let’s ask it a different way: Where does God most clearly manifest his presence today? The answer Paul gives is that God manifests his presence most clearly and most powerfully in the midst of the church gathered. Oh how I pray that truth will hit you smack between the eyes of your heart.

God brings people who were once estranged from Him and at enmity with one another; He performs a work of grace and reconciliation on their hearts making peace with Him and removing barriers of separation from men. And he performs this work with the intent of moving his people toward himself by moving them towards each other in community.

God has taken all the barriers away so that we can be a people who hope, love and worship and serve together. It is impossible to read in this passage any notion that Christianity is to be a just-me-and-God” religion. **Our salvation is a work of God that connects us to both him and his people.**

How does this vision impact you? Does it surprise you? Intimidate you? Annoy you? Encourage you?

How much does your life currently allow you to develop relationships that are deep enough to produce growth and change in both you and others?

Being involved with people is inefficient, complicated, messy and time-consuming. There are so many more ways for things to go wrong! But these are the very same reasons why community is such a big part of God's plan to transform us into his image. The more we understand our hearts in the context of relationships, the more we see it takes a work of grace to transform self-absorbed individuals into a community of love. Thus, being in community shows us our need for change *and* helps bring it about!

Community of Change is God's agenda and Paul's burden. Notice how he prayed:

Ephesians 3:14-21 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup>For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend **with all the saints** what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup>Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

It is tempting to view this prayer as a prayer for individuals to truly know the love of God, but this knowledge comes to us as we are part of a community. Look at Paul's language. Do you sense how big the love of Christ is? Can you imagine what it would take to tap into it? The love of Christ is so long and high and deep (infinite, in other words!) that we cannot see this love or experience it all by our finite selves. We have to grasp it "together with all the saints." Do you see these words in v. 18? As isolated individuals we can never reach the level of maturity that Christ is calling us to.

Here is an illustration I came across this week:

Think of what happens in a church when there is a death in a family. The pastor and others seek to comfort the family with promises from Scripture. Other people bring meals, watch children, make phone calls, run errands, clean the house, drive the family around, and make funeral arrangements. Still others help with the banking, budget, and insurance matters. Others simply weep with those who weep and send kind letters and notes to the grieving.

Wouldn't you agree that all the different elements combined together more fully reveal the love and power of God? Doesn't it provide more hope for the future, more encouragement to trust the Lord, more strength to do and be what God calls us to be? Everything is more powerful when it is combined with ministries of the rest of the body.

Think what it would be like to grieve alone. Think what it would be like to be detached from a Christian community.

So what is the point to all of this?

God's work of change and offer of help has relationships as both a necessary means and a wonderful goal. A humble community is not the icing on the cake of Christianity; it is the cake.