



# 4 | EPHESIANS 2:11-22

## GOD'S ANSWER FOR RACISM

*It is wrong to degrade anyone that is made in God's image. Rather, we should encourage them, love them, and lay our lives down for humanity as Jesus did.*

### Outline

- 1. RACISM COMES FROM AN ANCIENT HOSTILITY (2:11-12)**
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  - In Jesus We are Brought Near to Each Other
    - The Walls of Separation*
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- 3. INSTEAD OF RACISM WE HAVE A NEW COMMUNITY (2:14B-22)**
  - A New Humanity
  - A New Peace
  - A New Family

### Call to Worship

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; <sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the LORD more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. <sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. <sup>8</sup> And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. —Psalm 130:5-8

### Songs

*Shout to the North*  
*Goodness of God*  
*The Church's One Foundation*  
*How Sweet and Awesome is the Place*  
*In Christ Alone*

### Announcements

**WELCOME:** We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

## Introduction

One of the inspirations for this message is the story of my precious friend, Pastor Nathaniel Hawthorne Johnson. Pastor Nathaniel is a chaplain at Trinity University in Deerfield, Illinois. This precious man is the aroma of Jesus Christ. He's one of the sweetest humblest man I know. Let me share his story with you.

Nathaniel is named after his father, born in the 1920s: **Nathaniel Hawthorne Johnson**. His dad and uncles were all named after famous white Americans: Benjamin Franklin Johnson, Christopher Columbus Johnson, and Stonewall Jackson Johnson.

Pastor Nathaniel said, his family's names were given to instill hope to his family. He said, to have distinguished "white" names could provide personal safety as a black man at that time in Alabama where they grew up. He said, "Being named after a white man could make you seem less threatening and could open up doors for you maybe even save your life."

His **great-grandfather was a slave** and picked cotton in the 90-degree Alabama sun, for 13 hours a day during harvesting season. In the 1960s Nathaniel's mother got paid to pick cotton, but she hated it. It was so hard and so degrading.

Nathaniel was raised to feel like there was **something wrong with his "blackness."** He says, "Growing up I was made to feel like having dark skin was a disadvantage. I am dark skinned. I also was taught to hate my full lips and long mouth, some typical African American features."

I want to pause and say that this is a friend not that much older than me. And this is his experience.

When he was young, he **rode his bike into a white neighborhood, and he was got punched** and kicked and stomped on by a gang of young white people. An older white lady pulled up beside him in her car and rescued him. She drove him to the hospital, but no investigation was made. That's how things were back then. They just told him to stay out of the neighborhood. **He just wanted to fit in, but instead he got kicked in!**

He felt he had no friend on earth. His parents seemed to reject him. His dad was always disappointed in him. His mother abused him and yelled at him and hit him. He didn't see much of his dad. At the age of 12, he found a friend on earth in alcohol and marijuana. He started causing trouble, so his parents shipped him off at age 14 to **Howe Military School in Indiana**. He did well there, playing basketball, but got caught with pot a month before graduation. He got kicked out and joined the army. Because of his friendship with drugs, he only served a year in the Army, because his house was the off-base party house, so Uncle Sam said enough. That sent my friend Nathaniel into a downward spiral.

From age 24 to 34, he found **a new love affair with cocaine**. That became his best friend at first, but then it was his worst enemy. He eventually started stealing and lying to get money to get high. He had no real friends, just selfish people around him just like him.

One day at age 34, he broke into his drug dealer's house to steal drugs. He couldn't find drugs, **just twelve dollars**. His dealer pressed charges, and he went to jail. He got one year for each dollar he stole: twelve long years!

His first day in prison, he **started getting processed**. Processing takes around two weeks. During this time, they can go to the gym and lift weights. On his way to the gym, he passed the prison chapel. He could hear the singing. He skipped the gym and went into the chapel. By God's grace, no one noticed. He heard the singing, and it was like drinking water in a desert. For the first time he heard that he had a friend in Jesus. A true friend. He heard the preaching, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest!" Oh, how he needed that rest. The invitation was given, and he chose to follow Christ. So **for Nathaniel Hawthorne Johnson, his first day in prison was his first day of true freedom! He got written up** for going to the chapel, but he also **got his name written down in the Lamb's book of life!**

Something happened that was so wonderful that day. Nathaniel became a new creation, and his time in prison became a little seminary where he studied the Bible and grew in Christ. It was the best thing that ever happened to him.

Nathaniel had found a friend in Jesus, and he found a forever family through Jesus. And he was able to forgive the prejudice and the racism and the harassment he got his whole life. He found out what matters is not what is the color of my skin, but who is in Christ, and who is not. We are all members of the same human race, the one race. There are many families, but one human race. Today Nathaniel is a chaplain and a precious preacher. He's reconciling people and **tearing down the walls of hostility**.

Key thought: It is wrong to degrade anyone that is made in God's image. Rather, we should encourage them, love them, and lay our lives down for humanity as Jesus did.

### *What is racism?*

According to the Cambridge Dictionary,

Racism is (1) Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group. (2) Harmful or unfair things that people say, do, or think based on the belief that their own race makes them more intelligent, good, moral, etc. than people of other ethnicities.<sup>1</sup>

Racism is a problem we can't ignore or run away from. It's an issue today, and it was an issue throughout history, including when the Bible was written.

### *What does the Bible say about racism?*

This is a problem that Paul talks about in the New Testament. In first century AD, when Paul wrote, it was common to assign different values to different races and ethnicities. **Foreigners, women, and children were generally regarded as property owned** by the male heads of households and local rulers. Fifty percent of the Roman empire was made up of slaves. The conquerors enslaved the conquered.

Paul came into this atmosphere and boiling pot of racism, and he under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit said some pretty amazing things. Consider these principles taught in the New Testament.

- (1) There is no such thing as different races. There is one human race.

*Acts 17:26, NKJV* | God has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings

This means that **inter-racial marriage is a myth**. There is inter-family marriage. But we all have the same organs and blood. We are all made in God's image, equal before our great God.

- (2) God cares most what's on the inside.

*1 Samuel 16:7* | The LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

- (3) The pride of racism is the opposite of Christlike humility.

*Philippians 2:3* | Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney I. Landau, *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), "racism".

(4) God is not about dividing people into tribes and races, but bringing us together as one family in Christ.

He is about saving a multitude of people that cannot be numbered from every family on the earth. There's coming a day when God's people of all families will sing a new song, saying:

*Revelation 5:9* | Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

(5) In God's family, ethnic and social distinctions give way to our oneness in Christ. We see that **God puts away racism through the cross** of Jesus Christ.

*Galatians 3:28* | There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

(6) God cares how we treat each other because we're all created in his image.

*Genesis 1:27* | So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God cares how we treat each other because we're all created in his image (Gen 1:27). He makes no distinction between the inherent value of one race or ethnicity over another.

God cares about people regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, and social status (Deut 10:17-19).

"God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (Acts 10:34-35).

"We were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor 12:13).

"If you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers" (Jas 2:9).

About the age to come, we see a heavenly picture: "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev 7:9-10).

Jesus removes the hostility racism and introduces the harmony of our forever family (Eph 2:14-18).

## *Cancel Culture*

How does God, through the New Testament, answer the problem of racism? **Our culture is a cancel culture**, so their answer is unforgiveness. If you or your family or your great, great grandfather was a racist, then **you have to pay**. That is not God's answer. God's answer to racism is the payment Christ made for injustice. God answers injustice with the cross.

Let's look at that in Ephesians 2.

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## 1. RACISM COMES FROM AN ANCIENT HOSTILITY (2:11-12)

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There was a great war going on in the churches of the first century. Jews and Gentiles were at odds. The brilliant Greeks where there were all the philosophers said that anyone who was not a Greek was an ignorant Barbarian, including the Jews!

### A HEART PROBLEM

It wasn't so long ago when I was lost in sin and my heart was hard. God had not yet cut and circumcised my heart by his Spirit. I was like the hard soil: the seeds of the gospel did not

penetrate the depth of my heart because I was hardened by devil. I was spiritually dead. What a calloused heart I had. The apostle says we ought to remember this.

**Ephesians 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.

There was a great division between the Jews and the rest of the world. They were to be separated from all the other nations. They were to be humble, holy, and hungry for God. The sign of this was circumcision. Circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant and it pointed to the heart.

*Deuteronomy 10:16* | Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

*Deuteronomy 30:6* | And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

The Jews were called out of this world to be holy, but they were also to be humble! They lost that, and trusted in the outward sign instead of the inward reality. You trust in the outward, and you will become proud. They trusted in their outward circumcision. They were to have a broken heart for the nations, but **they missed the whole point. They had hard hearts.** We all have a heart problem!

*Jeremiah 17:9, NKJV* | The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

*Matthew 15:19-20* | Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person.

Some Christians still lean toward racism. The **most segregated time of the week is Sunday morning in most churches.** That’s sad.

Before we knew Christ, we were divided against each other. Many of us were racist and proud in our hearts. Many here come from broken lives and broken homes and broken hearts. But Christ heals us! Christ unites us! Christ brings us together.

## A RELATIONSHIP PROBLEM

Without Christ, we have **fear and frustration** and we are **self-centered**. We worship ourselves and demand our own way. Without Christ we have no hope of changing. **Our problem is not with other people.** It’s **not about being White, Black, Asian or Latino.** The problem is not being in Christ. Without Christ, we are **at war with God and strangers** to his promises.

**Ephesians 2:12** | 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.

Israel had the promise, the **covenantal commitment from God that Christ would come** and save us from ourselves.

We are bent inward and selfish. Selfishness is the key ingredient to misery. If you want to understand racism, just look at the hostility we have in other relationships. Husbands and wives fight. We pit our family and traditions over our spouse. We think we are better. We have no peace and no hope.

Look how hopeless we are without Christ In every conceivable way, we were far away from God. There was a time when as Gentiles we were separated from Christ, alienated from his kingdom (the commonwealth of Israel), strangers to his covenant, without hope, and without God in the world.

The covenantal promise was to Abraham that God would give him an offspring that would bless all nations. God called all nations to come to him. We see a trickle of it in the Old Testament.

**Caleb** was not an Israelite but a Kenizzite, descended from the **Edomites**, i.e. Esau (Num 32:12, Josh 14:6, 14). **Ruth** was a **Moabitess**. **Rahab** the harlot was from **Gentile Jericho**, and she was the great grandmother of David. **Naaman** was a General in the Syrian Army. Remember Elisha cured his leprosy in the river, and Naaman became a believer in the LORD. We think of **Nebuchadnezzar** who God humbled. Or what about the **500,000 Gentile Ninevites** who put their faith in the LORD? **Yet these conversions were not the norm.**

Israel didn't love the nations because most of **Israel did not love the Lord**. Our **hostility** like Israel was against the Lord. Israel did not love the Lord. What happens when you start loving God? Your hostility toward others goes away. You start having compassion on those you used to hate. You love them. God died for them. God loved the nations. And he promised to bless all nations through Jesus Christ.

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## 2. RACISM HAS A RADICAL SOLUTION (2:13-14A)

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The church of Jesus Christ is a miracle, because it is made up of every family, language, and nation. I love that our church has multiple language groups and multiple cultures. Glory to God. God is conquering racism through the blood of Jesus Christ. He brings us together through the blood of Jesus Christ.

### IN JESUS WE ARE BROUGHT NEAR TO GOD

**Ephesians 2:13** | But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

This is the language of the temple and sacrifices. For years God taught them that there was a price to be paid for sin.

And there is. Each of us is going to have to pay for our sins, or there must be a sinless sacrifice to pay. Someone has to pay that price. You can pay it yourself, or you can let someone else. But who would be that kind? Who would pay that price for you? The Old Testament saints sacrificed the innocent lamb. The only worthy sacrifice that God will accept on your behalf is Jesus. John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29).

One day all of us are going to bow our knee. You can bow the knee now and be Christ's eternal servant or bow the knee later and be his eternal enemy. Which will it be? Can you say, "I once was his enemy... but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (2:13)? Christ's blood refers to the theological concept of propitiation, which means a satisfaction of the righteous wrath of a good judge. God is angry with sinners every day. His wrath abides and remains upon all who are not in Christ. Our condemnation keeps us far away from God. God is so holy that he cannot dwell with sin or sinners. The only thing God wants to do with you is arrest you, prosecute you and condemn you to the righteous sentence of eternal damnation. But wait. Out steps Christ. He was born of a woman, born under the law. Unlike anyone else in humanity, he kept the law perfectly. Not only did he satisfy the justice of God's law, but he satisfied the justice of my condemnation for breaking his law.

## IN JESUS WE ARE BROUGHT NEAR TO EACH OTHER

Christ's propitiation results in peace with God and with each other. Education is good, but it won't solve our problem of pride and favoritism and racism. Good legislation is a blessing but it won't ultimately solve our problem with each other. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can bring us together. He can tear down the wall of hostility.

**Ephesians 2:14** | For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...

Every relationship works this way. This works for people groups as well as on a smaller level in marriage or friendships. The closer you come to Christ, the more humble you are, and the closer you come to each other. The blood of Christ does this. John says the same thing.

**1 John 1:7** | If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

These verses are illustrating our peace through the walls in the Jewish temple complex. There are various walls outside the temple that separated various peoples. The priests from the people, then the people were divided Jews first and then Gentiles. Jews were separated Male and Female. One thing was in common though. They were *all* outside of God's presence. None were allowed. This wall of hostility may separate us from our neighbor, a family member, a boss, but ultimately the wall separates us from who? From God.

### *The Walls of Separation*

Our text says that God has made both groups here, both Jew and Gentile, to be one in Christ. Now this distinction doesn't mean much to us today, but it was massive in the ancient world. Jews saw Gentiles as dogs! If a Jew saw a Gentile mother giving birth, they could not help that young mother because they did not want to help bring another Gentile dog into the world. Talk about conflict. In Christ's day, in the temple, there were barriers. Of course, the main emphasis in the temple was in the very center.

First, we see God himself in the center, represented by the Holy of holies. Outside of that was that was the court of the priests. Then there was the court of Jewish men. After that was the court of Jewish women. Finally, on the very outside there was a five-foot wall where you had the court of the Gentiles, who the Jews referred to as "dogs." They could not pass that wall, or they would be put to death. There were signs that said this in Greek and Latin.

### *Tearing Down the Wall of Hostility*

When Christ died, he destroyed that wall of distinction. There was an unnecessary distinction at this time. The point God was making in the temple is that none of us is able to approach him. Only the high priest, a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ, could go into the Holy of Holies on our behalf, and that once a year. Some have even said that the high priest may have needed a rope around him in order to drag him out in case of death. Neither the Jews or the Gentiles could approach God on their own. The Jew was certainly closer because he had the Word of God, he had the promises of God, but those promises were not applied for the majority of the Jews. Most of them lived and died in self-righteousness and in unbelief. They had a spirit of slumber!

But in Christ, all the walls of division have been torn down. How? "In his flesh..." Indeed, Christ "has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (2:14). In Christ's incarnation, he became flesh and substituted his life for us. He settled our account with God. Christ is our peace! He is our Mediator. He is our Advocate. His nail pierced hands settle the argument in God's courtroom. Satan cries out against us day and night against the saints of God (Rev 12:10), but

Christ has cast him down! Christ has conquered him! All that Satan says is true about us, but it's all been put on Christ. We have peace with God. Christ himself is our peace. It's an emphatic statement. Christ settled our hostility with the Father.

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## 3. INSTEAD OF RACISM WE HAVE A NEW COMMUNITY (2:14B-22)

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In saving us, God was bringing about a holy union with himself through Christ. We have this new community. He calls it a new humanity, a new place of peace, a new family.

### A NEW HUMANITY

Ephesians 2:14b-15 | For he himself... has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility... <sup>15</sup>...that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two.

**The “us” is people from every possible language and culture.** God has made us one and broken down anything that might divide us. He's chosen us out of every “people, language, family, and nation”. We may have nothing else in common, but we love Jesus. We are united in Christ. He settled the hostility between Jew and Gentile. No longer do ethnic divisions divide us. There are no socio-economic divisions. We are one in Christ. He has torn down the wall of hostility! “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27-28). In saving us, God was bringing about a holy union with himself through Christ.

### A NEW PEACE

Ephesians 2:15-16 | 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.

The requirement of “the law of commandments expressed in ordinances” that was hanging over us was abolished in Christ. He lived the perfect life. He kept all the laws perfectly. **Now his righteousness is our righteousness.**

**Only in Christ can we have peace with God and peace with each other.** Christ has done it all. Christ has come and abolished the hostility between you and God. You can't fulfill the Law, but Christ did. You cannot live holy without Christ. If you want to be reconciled to God, you must turn to Christ. If you want to be reconciled to men, you must turn to Christ.

Christ settled the hostility between us and his Father. He did this by keeping the Mosaic Law perfectly. He obeyed the law actively and passively for us.

The hostility God had towards us was put on him. The hostility we had with God was fully satisfied for you and all who come to Him by faith. Do you realize how great a hostility it was God had toward you? Think of eternity with His holy wrath fully fixed against you. “For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21).



Christ abolished the law and ordinance to bring a peace. **He completed the Law perfectly by fulfilling all the types and shadows of the Old Testament.** All the sacrificial laws, All the dietary laws, All the ceremonial laws, All the moral law. Christ did it all. No longer do we have the shadow of sacrificial laws, dietary laws, ceremonial laws. No longer do we have the condemnation of the moral law. “Christ is our peace.” By bringing us peace with God, we have peace with each other.

How is this peace possible? Because whoever is forgiven much will love much. And we will forgive the injustices to the point **we are willing to worship with those who were once our enemies, but are now part of our forever family.**

What does this mean? Because Christ abolished the standard of law keeping for me since he kept it for me, I can never be more righteous than I am right now. I will never have more of a right standing than I have right now. All who know Christ are part of this peaceful humanity.

Hostility will come when we focus on each other. Harmony comes when we fix our eyes on Jesus.

## A NEW FAMILY

God takes those who were once enemies, racist, prideful people, and brings them together into one new family.

**Ephesians 2:17-22** | 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.

We are no longer strangers, but family. We may have so little in common outside of Christ, but we have everything in common because of Christ. You are my forever family!

Whether you realize it or not, you need the divine community of the church. The church is God’s new humanity. It’s messy, but it’s alive in Christ. Christ promises: “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). In the next chapter we are going to see how much we need each other as a body. God has ordained the church, a fellowship of the flawed, to carry out his purpose and will in the world. When we consider the biblical teaching on the church, we realize the church is vitally important for growing in Christ. Like a branch that grows because of its connection to the tree, we thrive when we stay connected to the church as we are each connected with Christ.

### Conclusion

As God’s forever family, we stand up for each other. Not long ago I was at a **gas station**, and a man was harassing a newly arrived girl from India. She was so sweet, but this man was bullying her saying he had a gas card that didn’t work, and she was going to give him money for that card. What would you do in that situation?

I am not usually like this, but I walked up to the man face to face and I said, “Get out of here or I will call the police. You are harassing this girl and that’s against the law. Get out! Get out now!” That big man listened to me. He got out of there. We need to do that. We **need to stand up** in the face of injustice. We need to **forgive where you have been treated wrong and unjustly**. Most of all we need to remember that the cross is the answer to all the injustice and racism in this world. What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

## **Benediction**

*Romans 15:5-6, "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*