

Family

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. Great to see you today. That was a really good response. Very loud, lots of volume. I feel like I don't even really need to preach anymore after Oti and Lorna is sharing just now. We're talking about the church being family today, and I think they pretty much covered most of it, right? But no, we'll still do the sermon.

Um, for those of you who have seen me between Friday night around 6.45 and five minutes before service started today, you would have noticed something weird about me. Either you saw me bleeding profusely out of my finger, or you saw me with a huge bandage on my finger. And that was because right as we were about to start CG together on Friday night, I caught my finger on something and sliced it open and had to go get stitches in the hospital. And I figure everyone who's seen me during that time probably deserves a little explanation. I'm doing okay. I got three stitches.

Um, and it's more just annoying than anything, you know, like I was supposed to help out with some stuff at CG together and couldn't because I was bleeding all over the place. And, you know, having to keep my hand dry is annoying, but it's fine. It's healing up. It's, yeah, the big bandage is off.

We've got a small bandage now. And, you know, as we, as we come to talk about family today, I actually can't think of a better time for an injury like that to have happened to me because I got to experience the reality of the church being a family on Friday night. I had people rush in and start helping me clean up the wound as soon as it happened. I had people step in and cover for me in the roles that I was supposed to do as CG together. I had people messaging and asking, do you need me to come wait in the emergency room with you? And I was like, no, I'm fine. And I had one friend who just ignored me and came anyway and made the waiting so much better. And so I just want to say thank you to everyone who asked about how I was doing and took care of me during that time. I really experienced the church as a family through that experience and doing much better now. So that's the nice, fluffy, friendly welcome. And it's not going to stay that way the rest of our time together this morning.

I've also had bronchitis this week. So if my voice goes weird, that's why. The past couple weeks, we've been looking at what it means for us to be God's people. Who are we as Christians? A couple weeks ago, we started out by looking at what it means for us to be disciples. And we said that Christ's call to us is a call to come and die. That it means giving up our way that we want the world to work and instead pursuing God's way of the world working. And we saw that being a Christian is something that's supposed to rule over our lives in their entirety. Last week, we talked about being saints. And we said a saint isn't just some super Christian, but actually all Christians are saints.

[3 : 15] Saint just means that we're a people set apart as a special possession for God. And when we become Christians, we are set apart as a special possession for God. And we saw that being a Christian, it's not just about following a set of rules, but it's about pursuing this relationship with God. And the Bible uses a lot more images to describe who we are as Christians. In the next few weeks, we're going to be looking through some of those. But today, we're going to look at what it means for us to be a family. And we're going to see that there was a former hostility between us and God and us and one another. But Christ has brought reconciliation, and that requires a response from us. So we have a former hostility, a current reconciliation, and a required response. And before we start talking about that, let's just pray. Father, we thank you. We thank you for the fact that we as your people are a family. We pray that you would draw us together and help our love for you and for one another grow through this time together today. We pray that you would speak to us, that you would speak powerfully, that you would transform us as we come under the teaching of your word. And in Jesus' name, amen. So first off, we said we have former hostility. If you look at the first couple verses of this passage, there's a lot of hostility going on here. Paul's writing to a group of Gentiles, which basically means non-Jews. And he says that their former state, they were, in verse 12, separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, that's God's people, and strangers to the covenants of promise. They were apart from God, apart from God's people, and apart from the pathway that could bring them to God. And because of that, they were without God and without hope in the world. It's a pretty bleak outlook for them. However, the Jews, who are God's people, weren't actually much better off, according to

Paul. He writes it, he writes this passage in a way that makes it sound like they're better off, but if you look more closely at what he's saying, he's actually saying they thought they were better off, but they weren't. He says that in verse 11, the Jews were called the circumcision. In other places, he refers to Christians as the true circumcision. Circumcision, if you don't know, was a ceremony that the Jews did that set them apart from other people, where every boy on the eighth day of his life would have his foreskin chopped off, and that would set them apart so they knew this is a Jewish boy. And what Paul is saying is that when we become Christians, God does something to our hearts that transforms us in a similar way, that we become his people. And that's why he says the church is the true circumcision. But here, referring to the Jews, he says they're called the circumcision. That's different than being the true circumcision. So he says they think they're better off, but they're really not.

And then he says it's made in the flesh by hands. Again and again in the Bible, you see, we can't do anything through our efforts to earn or merit a relationship with God. So the fact that they are relying on their own accomplishments shows that they are just as far from God as the Gentiles.

So the Gentiles are separated from God. The Jews are separated from God. And then the Jews and the Gentiles are separated from each other as well. Again, we saw this in verse 12. The Gentiles were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. They, the Jews, basically saw themselves as better than the Gentiles because they had God's law. They were obedient to God's law, and they looked down on anyone else who wasn't as obedient to God's law as they were. And so we have just brokenness. We have alienation and hostility. And in our world today, we have plenty of brokenness and alienation and hostility. Now, it's not mostly along the lines of Jews versus Gentiles like it was in this passage, but it's still there. And C.S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, says that at the root of this hostility is pride. Here's what pride does. Pride turns life into a competition. So rather than looking at everyone else and seeing them as people who share the image of God with me and deserve my love, I instead see them as competitors that I need to beat. And so when you're prideful, you're not content with having lots of money or being really intelligent or having a very beautiful spouse.

You have to define yourself against everyone else. And so you only become content if you have more money and more intelligence and a more beautiful spouse than everyone else. And I saw a post online this week that it's wonderful. It just shows this principle so clearly. I'm going to read it to you so you can hear it and see if you notice what I noticed in this post. This guy said, I need to understand whether this is normal in Manhattan. I thought I made a very good income.

[8 : 29] It's been around a million U.S. dollars a year for the past couple of years, and I have about three million dollars invested. Now, does anyone think that's a lot of money? A couple of us. A couple of us think that's a lot of money. I think a couple more probably do, but didn't want to raise their hands. So he has all this money, yet I feel like I'm living in the middle class. Every parent at my kid's school is running around buying six million dollar condos like it's the standard, literally. We rent a nice place, which saves money, but my wife is frustrated because she can't make it her own space. What's going on here? I just need to know if I'm delusional or what does it take to live comfortably in New York City? I thought I was doing pretty well, but I realize I can't afford a five million dollar condo like apparently all these other people around me can. It's wonderful. And here's why. This guy is making a lot of money, and he's complaining about not having enough. That's pride. He's not content with what he has. He has to define himself against everyone else around him. And you know, as someone who makes a tiny fraction of what this guy makes, it's easy for me to look at him and be like, yes, you're right, you are delusional. But here's what I love about this post. If I was in that guy's shoes, I would feel the exact same way.

I'd probably be too embarrassed to actually say it, but I'd be thinking all these things too. Like, I thought I was making a lot of money. How come everyone else seems to still have more than me? That's what pride does to us. It forces us to compare ourselves to everyone around us. I mean, think about it. This guy makes more money in one year than most people in his city will make in the next 15 to 20 years combined. And he's still complaining that he doesn't have enough. By any objective standard, he's set for life. He could literally give away 80 to 90% of his salary and still have more left over than most people in his city make. And instead of focusing on how blessed he is, he complains about the \$6 million condo that he can't afford. He's saying it's not okay to have more than enough if more than enough is less than the person next door. Michael Lewis, the author of

Moneyball, The Big Short, The Blind Side, he actually started his career on Wall Street. And he wrote a book about his time on Wall Street. And in that book, he said, in reference to banking, you don't get rich in this business. You only attain new levels of relative poverty.

And what he meant is, if you get a \$100,000 bonus at the end of the year, and the guy next to you gets a million dollar bonus, \$100,000 doesn't really feel like that much anymore. And if you get the million dollar bonus and your boss gets the \$10 million bonus, a million dollars doesn't feel like that much. And I'm not saying this is any type of slam on bankers or anything. I just think it beautifully illustrates the point that we define ourselves against one another. I think banking is a very important industry. If you work in banking, I have nothing against you. But I think Michael Lewis's comment beautifully illustrates this point, that pride makes us define ourselves against one another. We no longer see people as made in the image of God and deserving our love. We see them as a standard that I have to beat to have worth and value in life. And it leads us to have this separation between us and one another. And here's the thing, all of us suffer from pride. All of us, at some way, on some level, define ourselves against one another. If you think that's not true of you, just think, when do you get upset because something good happened to someone else?

Maybe there's a coworker and they get a promotion. It's not even a promotion that you were like eligible for. You're like, oh, they've been at the company less time than me and now they have a higher rank than me. That's not right. That's pride. Or who are the people that you have a hard time seeing as truly equals in life? I realize this about myself, that for a huge part of my life, I've been very happy to go serve in different ministries that reach out to less privileged people than myself.

[13 : 08] And I will go there and I will serve with a smile on my face and I will care for them like nothing else. But I actually don't see them as equals. And here's how I can tell. Because if I was having trouble, I wouldn't reach out to them and ask for help. There's this part of me that for so much of my life, it said I'm above being helped by the people that I'm helping. And so even though I was willing to go and interact with them and have a smile on my face, there's this part of me that says I'm doing this because I'm better than you. And that's this attitude that's going on in this passage between the Jews and the Gentiles. This failure to see people as truly equal with us and truly sharing the image of God with us. And all of us struggle with this. It can come in different ways.

It can be based on ethnic differences. We see this with things like the Black Lives Matter movement in the States. It can be religious differences. I mean, you look at the Rohingyas in Myanmar right now, and they're suffering from that. It can be political differences. You know, in Hong Kong, we have the pro-independence camp and the pro-Beijing camp. And if me mentioning either of those parties made your blood pressure rise a little bit, that might be a sign that you have pride against them.

But I think, this is a guess, I could be wildly wrong. I think in our context, the biggest area where this happens is the socioeconomic level. My guess would be for most of us in this room, and again, I could be wrong, my guess would be for most of us, it's far easier to connect with and see as equal someone with a different skin color from a different country who has a similar level of education and makes a similar amount of money with us than it is for us to connect and see ourselves as truly equal with someone who has the same skin color as us, comes from the same country, but makes a very different amount of money and has a very different level of education.

Again, I could be wrong about that, but I think that is, you know, I look around our city and I see people from all different backgrounds coming together, but they have that in common so often.

The background of similar education, similar jobs, similar income. And I think that's one of the biggest areas in our society that these lines get drawn along. And what Paul is saying in this passage is that this attitude of pride, when we put our identity in ourselves being better than others, it shows the fact that there's separation not only between us and each other, but between us and God as well. Because each of us is relying on our own efforts to make us better than everyone else. And as long as we're focused on our own efforts and our own achievements, we're not going to truly have a relationship with God. We're not going to have the deep type of relationship with each other that God wants us to have. And Paul, he starts out the passage by telling them to remember this. Remember your former state. Because when you see that, you can see how great and amazing the work of Christ at transforming us truly is. Which brings us to the current reconciliation. And here's what Paul says,

[16 : 21] Christ tears down the dividing wall. In Ephesians 2, 1 through 10, which we don't have time to look at today, he talks about how Christ tears down the wall between us and God. And here in verses 11 through 22, he's talking about how Christ tears down the wall between us and one another.

In verse 14, it says that he has made us both one and he has torn down or broken down in his flesh, the dividing wall of hostility. The gospel, he is saying, tears down the things that we build up that keep us apart from one another. And here's why that happens. Because when I'm consumed with pride, I want to be better than everyone else. And so what I do is I stand up here on the stage of my life and I look down on everyone else. And all of us do this. We create a stage so we can be higher than everyone else. We set a standard that's completely arbitrary and subjective of what it takes to get up on the stage that allows us to stand there and no one else to meet that standard. And then we look down on everyone else. And as long as our focus is looking down on everyone else, we can keep creating this totally subjective, totally arbitrary standard that allows us to look down on the rest of the world.

But here's what the gospel does. When I look up and I see how amazing God is, there's no more room for me on this stage. I have to be down on an equal level with everyone before God. Because with God, there is nothing, nothing that I can do that sets me any higher than anyone else. When I look at God, I see a God who I deserve to be crushed by instantly.

And the fact that he looked down at me and rather than crushing me, sent his son to rescue me. And then when I had this heart that hated his son and wanted nothing to do with him, he sent his spirit to open my eyes and show me how beautiful and amazing he is. There's nothing about me or my greatness in that process. And when I'm looking up and I see God and I see who he really is and I see the beauty of the gospel and what he has done to rescue me, I no longer have any grounds for being on the stage and looking down at everyone else. I'm at the very least an equal, if not lower, than everyone else. Because I can see how totally messed up my own heart is. I can't see that depth of brokenness in each of you. When I see the gospel, I have no grounds for seeing myself as better than anyone else. That's how Christ breaks down the walls. The walls that I build up that allow me to stay here rather than be on a level platform with everyone are torn down by the gospel. When I see that it's not about me and what I do, but it's all God.

And so for the Jews in this passage, that wall was the law. They had God's law, which was a good gift to them, and they did their best to keep God's law. But they took that good gift that God had given them and they made it ultimate in their lives.

[19 : 55] They basically said, we keep the law, you don't. So we're going to stand on the stage, and what it takes to get on this stage is keeping the law. If you want to keep the law, you can be on the stage with us, maybe. We might throw in a couple extra things you need to do to get up here also. But the law, which God gave them as a good gift so that they could know him, all of a sudden became the barrier that kept them apart from everyone else. That's why it says in this passage that Christ tore down the law. He abolished the law because this good gift that God had given them had become a bad thing that allowed them to set themselves apart from everyone else. And that's how it works in our lives too. We take good things, and rather than seeing them as good things, we use them to set ourselves apart from the rest of the world. Maybe it's a good work ethic. You know, if you have a good work ethic, that's awesome. But if you look down on anyone else who doesn't work as hard as you and see them as less worthy as a human being because they don't work as hard, your good thing has become a bad thing. It could be prioritizing your family. If you prioritize your family, that's very important. That's great. But if you look at someone who doesn't prioritize their family as much as you and see them as less of a human being because of that, your good thing has become a bad thing. And here's the nature of the way that we judge ourselves and the way that we set these standards. Like I said, it's completely arbitrary and subjective.

So if you're the guy who's working really hard, you're going to look at the guy who prioritizes his family and be like, he's a loser. He doesn't work as hard as me. And if you're the guy who prioritizes his family, you're going to look at the guy who works really hard and be like, what a punk. He doesn't prioritize his family. Everyone sets their own standard that allows them to stay on the stage while everyone else has to stay off of it. And we do this with so many good things in our lives. It could be our education. It can be our jobs. It can be our morality. That's what it was for the Jews in this passage. But whenever we take these good things in our lives and we use them as a basis for judging someone's merit and whether they deserve our love and whether they deserve to be treated as just a fellow human being, we've taken this good thing that God has given us and we've used it in a terrible, terrible way. And Jesus comes to tear down those walls.

And in doing that, he, it says in verse 18, that through him, we both have access in one spirit to the father. That when we come to Christ, he makes God our father. And here's the thing about a father.

Father, if you and I have the same father, what does that make us? Brothers and sisters. When Christ comes and he tears down these walls and he gives us access to God, that makes us family. That makes us brothers and sisters. We have a new reality. We're no longer divided from each other by these walls that we set up. The walls have been torn down and we now have a common family because we share a father. We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

And that requires a response from us. You know, this, this new reality, it's true. We are brothers and sisters. It's not a question of whether we'll become brothers and sisters by trying hard enough. The question is, now that we are brothers and sisters, are we actually going to live like it?

[23 : 30] Or are we going to continue living in our old ways? This guy, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he was a German theologian in the early 1900s. He got killed in the Holocaust. He wrote a lot of awesome stuff about Christian community. And he said, Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize.

It is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The reality is already there in what Jesus has accomplished. The question that remains is whether we're going to live as if that reality is true. So how should our lives be different because of this new reality?

First off, it's a call to actively reject individualism. To actively reject individualism. We live in a culture that says everything in my life should be about me.

You have no right to tell me what to do or say something to me that I don't want to hear. And if you do say it, I can leave. I don't need to be tied down to things that are inconvenient or uncomfortable. If we get in a situation where things are uncomfortable or inconvenient, we just get out of there. If I'm at a church for the good preaching and the preacher leaves and there's going to be a period of potentially mediocre preaching while they find a new good preacher, I'll just go to the church down the street where they already have a good established preacher. If I'm in a CG and they're calling out sin in my life that I don't want to deal with, just stop going to CG or change churches.

I'm in control. Life is about me. And that's the way that culture tells us to live. There's a guy, Jonathan Lehman, and he wrote a book and he summarized the view of ourselves that culture has. And this is what he said. He said, for the average person today, every attachment is negotiable. We're all free agents and every relationship and life station is a contract that can be renegotiated or canceled. I'm principally obligated to myself and maximizing my life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Among my various relationships, I may choose to identify with another party, but only so long as doing so clearly gives me a personal advantage.

[25 : 48] I retain veto power over everything. And here's the thing. If the ultimate good in the world is our own individual autonomy, this is the right attitude to have. We keep veto power over everything so we can pursue what is most convenient for us. But if we're called to something bigger, if we're called to live not just as individuals but as a family, then this cannot be the way that we approach our church community.

You know, last week, Chris was talking about the church as saints. And he talked about how our glorious God created us in his image. And part of being in the image of God is that we were created to be glorious. And every time that God calls us to obey him, it's because he wants us to be glorious. And when we choose to obey him, we're choosing to become more glorious. And when we disobey and choose our way rather than God's, we're rejecting that and choosing to be less glorious than we were made to be. And this may come as a surprise to you because of the individualistic nature of our culture. But that sermon and this sermon actually go hand in hand.

You know, I think if we think about becoming disciples as our goal, and we talk about the different aspects of what it means to be a disciple, we can see over here we have saints. That's one attribute of a disciple. And down here we have family. And the next couple weeks we're going to talk about servants and ambassadors too.

But if you think about this as a wheel, if I'm spending lots of time reading my Bible, and I'm spending lots of time trying to deal with sin in my life and to pursue God individually, and I'm growing so much over on this side, but I'm not growing down here, I'm going to have a really, really lopsided wheel. You know, if you think of it as like a car, you're putting air in your tire.

And as you put air in the tire, this side of the tire just gets really, really big, and this side of the tire stays the same. You're not thinking, oh, this is great. My tire is getting more air in it. You're thinking, uh-oh, something's wrong. And if you try to drive on that tire, at best, you're going to have a bumpy ride. At worst, your tire is going to blow out and you're going to crash your car because the tire had something terribly wrong with it. And either way, you're probably going to do hundreds, if not thousands of dollars in screwing up your car's alignment as you drive on that wheel. And it's not just that we have this cool graphic that fits in, that makes them go together, but actually the very nature of what it means to be a saint and to be a member of God's family goes hand in hand. If you look at, so in verse 18, he says that we're family.

[28 : 40] We have access to the Father together. Verse 19, we're members of the household of God. Again, a family image. And then in verse 21, he says we're being joined together and we're growing into a holy temple in the Lord. And we can't see this in our English translation, but in the original language, this word for holy right here is the same word used for saints. So God brings us together into a family so that we can grow as saints. You need one for the other to happen. And it makes sense if you think about what it means for us to be saints. See, part of the problem of my sin is that I'm blind to the fact that I'm a sinner. And I mean, there are parts of it that I can recognize, but there are huge parts of my life and my heart that are totally broken by sin and I'm completely blind to them.

And as long as I'm pursuing God on my own, I'm going to stay blind to those and I'm not going to be able to deal with those areas of my heart. And I'm not going to be able to bring those areas of my heart under what Christ wants me to be. But when I engage in community and I have family around me, family who's going to, you know, if you think about family, the thing about family is with friends, someone does something that annoys you, you can just get out of there. With family, you have to stick with everyone even when you know their crap.

Right? And if someone does something that bothers you, you have to deal with it. You can't just ignore it. Or it's, you can't ignore it, but it's going to be just really awkward for a long time. Right? And so when I'm living in family with the church, I'm going to do things that annoy people and hurt people. And when that happens, I'm going to realize parts of my heart that are broken.

This happened a couple of years ago. I was a very sarcastic person. Didn't think it was a big deal. Until I made a sarcastic comment to someone that I really cared about one day and hurt this person a lot with my comment. And rather than just running off and ignoring me because I had hurt them, this person came to me and talked to me about it and said, you know, I think there's something going on, Eric. I think you think your sarcasm is this innocent thing, but it's not. I think there's some hurt going on inside you and you're using your sarcasm to cover it up. And they were right.

I was using my sarcasm as a defense mechanism because I didn't want to say something you did hurt me. It was much easier to just do something that would hurt them back. And through that experience, through that encounter, I was able to grow because I was living in community as a family and had people who were willing to point out the sin in my life. But family also helps us to grow as saints because not just we do things that hurt other people and annoy them, but other people do things that annoy us. And we get frustrated and annoyed, but actually that's a gift from God. Have you ever thought about that? In chapter four of Ephesians, Paul says to bear with one another.

[31 : 57] And as Chris always points out, Paul says we need to bear with one another because people in the church are unbearable. When I am praying with God in the morning, it's so easy to think that I am the most forgiving and loving person in the world. And then I go talk to someone and they say something that's just so annoying. And all of a sudden I realize I'm not as loving and forgiving as I thought I was. And here's the thing. In that moment when they say something that's really annoying, and I realize I'm not as loving and forgiving as I thought I was, the way I want to respond is in anger. Because they hurt me, they annoyed me, they offended me. But here's how seeing the church as a family and seeing family as a tool to help us grow closer to God changes our perspective. When they do something that hurts me, rather than being annoyed, frustrated, angry, I can be thankful. Because I recognize that God's using this to draw me to himself and to point out areas of my heart where I still need growth, where I still need to become more like Jesus. And this type of growth is something that only happens when we're engaging in family at a deep level that's willing to be uncomfortable and awkward around each other and show each other all our junk. Because that's how God is going to transform our lives. And even further, this engagement and acceptance that we have for one another within the church, it should go beyond the typical extent to which acceptance goes in the world.

If you think about it, in the world, people are really happy having a group of people around them that they love. But what our tendency is, is to get all of our friends up on the stage with us, and then we as a group create a wall that separates us from everyone else and lets us look down on them.

So it could be a hobby like, oh, me and my friends all love model trains. And if you don't love model trains, you're just not good enough to be up here on the stage with us. Or it could be, again, like I said, things like work ethic, prioritizing family. You know, if you have an office full of hard workers, it's very easy for your office to be like, we're up here on the stage, our company is better than anyone else. If you're not working for our company, working however many hours a week, you're just not as good. And we remain faithful to the people who are like us and share that trait that sets us apart.

But there's a whole world of people that we set out as below us and separate from us. And just like what Jesus did with the Jews and the Gentiles in this passage, Jesus tears down the walls that keep us from one another. If we are Christians, there is no grounds. There's no grounds for us seeing ourselves as better than anyone else on the basis of our accomplishments or what we've done. There's a guy named Miroslav Volf. He wrote a book called Exclusion and Embrace, and he outlines four ways that we exclude others. The first, he calls it decimation.

It's like genocide. Hopefully that's not happening in the church. But if you want examples of that, that's like the Holocaust or what's happening with the Rohingyas in Myanmar right now. But the other three, I think we can see fairly easily in the church. The second is assimilation, which says, I will accept you if you become just like me. This is what's happening in this passage with the Jews.

[35 : 47] They have the law, and they basically say to the Gentiles, if you will get circumcised, if you will keep the law, you can come stand on the stage with us. But until you do that, you're below us. And this is what happens in the church when we have a CG full of married people, and a random single person joins the group. Now, we as the married people in the group, we're excited to have a new person in the group who's different than us, and we'll get to know their name, and we'll invite them to hang out with us. But when it comes time for serious discussion, we're always talking about marriage problems. And it's not something we're doing consciously, but we're subconsciously sending this message that if you want to be fully included in this group, you've got to change your relationship status. And that's not to say that this group should all of a sudden stop talking about marriage issues, but how often do we take a step back and just say, how can we lovingly, intentionally engage this person without saying to them, you have to change and be like us in order to earn our acceptance. The third way we exclude people, he says, is subjugation, which is what happened in segregation in America. It's where we say, you know, you can be here, but you can't have these jobs. You can't live in these places. You can't go to these schools. And I think this is what happens in a church when a new mom with two kids and a helper walks into the service. And we walk over and we're so excited and we say, hey, it's great to have you here. My name's Eric. And we shake the mom's hand and we learn her name and we shake the kids' hands and we learn their name. And then we just give a little smile and nod to the helper. You know, you can be here. You're an employee, not part of the family. So we're not going to really give you the full rights and privileges of being here with us. And when we invite the family to lunch with us after church, you can join us for lunch, but you're at the kids' table because that's your job.

You can be here, but you can't really be equal with us. And again, there's no place for that type of attitude among God's people when Christ has torn down the walls. The final way he says we exclude people is simply ignoring them. We pretend like they don't exist. We overlook them. We don't engage them at all. And honestly, I think that's probably the most common way that we exclude people as good, respectable Christians. If I don't talk to you, I'm not going to say anything mean to you.

If I don't talk to you, you're not going to annoy me and get some bad reaction out of me. So I'm just going to avoid you. And what Paul is saying in this passage is that as people who have been purchased by the blood of Christ, there is no room for any of that in the church.

There's no room for forcing people to assimilate or be subjugated or ignoring them as the body of Christ. Because Christ died to tear down these walls. He made us a family. And as the family of Christ, if you are a Christian, you have more in common with a Christian living in some small remote village who has never been to school and can't read and can't do math out in some remote village of some obscure country than you do with the non-Christian who sits next to you at work. Because what you share with that Christian in that small remote village is that Christ has purchased you and made you brothers and sisters and you're going to spend eternity together. And Paul's saying, look, this is reality. We're spending eternity together as God's children. Let's live like it now.

And it's not easy, but there's a pastor, John Piper. He gives six steps that I think if we can incorporate these into the way that we interact with each other will make a huge difference in us taking a step in the right direction of including and having a community that goes beyond just people like us to a community that's different than us. So the six steps, the first, avoid gossiping.

[39 : 57] You know, when someone's different, it's so easy to just complain about their differences to everyone and nothing tears about a community quicker than gossiping. Step two, identify evidences of grace in each other and speak them to each other and about each other. Instead of looking for what's wrong with someone, look for what God's doing in their life. And when you see it, tell them, you know, Chris, I see you becoming so much more patient these days. Or Ed, I see you really caring for your family. These types of things. And then don't just say them to that person. But then when you're having a conversation with Michelle, be like, you know, God's doing some amazing things in Chris. Not in a way that like betrays confidence or anything, but in a way that celebrates the fact that God is working in our family and that he's bringing all of us closer to him. Step three, if we feel the need to communicate criticism, speak it directly to the person. If I have a problem with Chris, don't talk to Graham and Oti and Joyce and everyone else about it and avoid Chris. Just say it to Chris. Step four, look for and assume the best motive in the other's viewpoint, especially when we disagree. This can be tough because when we disagree, I'm right, you're wrong. Obviously, that's why we're disagreeing. And you're wrong because you have bad motives. But that's usually not the case. That's usually just an interpretation of the case that I give. And so when we look for and assume the best motives, we're going to be able to engage with each other much more lovingly. Five, think often of the magnificent things we have in common. You know, if I spend my days daydreaming about how wonderful and amazing it is that God has rescued not only me, but also Sherman and Steven and Carlo, then when I'm having a conversation with one of those guys and, you know, something goes wrong in the conversation, my mind's going to automatically snap back to, wow, we have so much in common. We have Christ in common. This little thing that separates us is so trivial in comparison to the fact that we have Christ in common and we are family. And that is magnificent. And when that's at the center of my mind, I'm not going to exclude people. I'm not going to look down on people. I'm not going to think I'm better than people.

And finally, be more amazed that we're forgiven than that we're right. I love being right. It's one of the walls that I build up. I can stand on the stage because I'm right. But when I'm more amazed that Christ has forgiven me than I am about being right, I'm going to take the time to forgive others, to love others, to accept others.

And guys, if we just kept going through this passage and the ways that it should impact our community, we could be here for weeks. And I've already run way over the time that I have right now. But Christ has torn down the walls. Christ has made us a family. I want you to do something really quick in closing. I want you to say out loud, Christ died for me so that I can be part of his family. Now, look to the person to your left. I know you're looking at the back of their head, but you can still see them. I want you to say, Christ died for him or her so they can be my brother or sister. Now you're going to look to your right. Christ died for him or her so he or she can be my brother or sister. And now the person in front of you. Christ died for him or her so he or she can be my brother or sister. And now just to get the full circle, the person behind you. Christ died for him or her so he or she can be my brother or sister. Guys, do we believe that's true?

Will we live like that's true this week? That's the call that Christ has for us. We're a family. Let's live like it. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your love. We thank you that you are an awesome God who sent your son to rescue us when we were far away from you. And we thank you that by doing that, you have made us a family with one another. We thank you for the glorious things that we have in common, for the fact that Christ unites us, that Christ brings us together and makes us brothers and sisters in you.

[44 : 54] We pray that you forgive us for the times that we forget these truths and rebuild the walls that you died to tear down. God, we love you. Teach us to love one another.

Teach us to interact with one another based on the love that you have for us. Jesus' name. Amen.