

Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Prison Epistles, Session 23, New Community in Christ, Ephesians 2:11-22

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This is Dr. Dan Darko in his lecture series on the Prison Epistles. This is session 23, New Community in Christ, Ephesians 2:11-22.

Welcome back to our Biblical Studies lecture series on prison epistles.

We have been looking at Ephesians, and so far, we've covered up to Ephesians chapter two, verse 10. In the last lecture, we looked at salvation by grace, and in this lecture, we will be looking at what I call a new community in Christ. In the discussion on salvation by grace, I reminded you of what we all have in common, and that is Paul's point.

Paul's point is that before we all became saved by God's grace, we were all living in sin. In fact, he uses a very, very serious language. We were all dead in our sins and trespasses, and in verse three, he said we were by nature children of wrath.

He referred to our pre-Christian past as a life lived by sons of disobedience, a people whose lives are characterized by disobedience. Just when God looked at our state at that time, all of us, regardless of our economic status, height, and BMI, were in that column. God was supposed to be in to come and punish us, and then he chose a different route.

He showed his truest character, showing mercy and love. Paul will issue that parenthetical line in the middle of it as if to tease them out. For by grace, you have been saved, and then, in verse eight, he comes in and says, now let's talk about it. By grace you have been saved through faith.

Paul reminds us that we were once in a place that was not so good, and God reached out to us and brought us to a place where he made us live a life of fullness. In chapter 2, verses 11 to 22, we are going to be looking at how Paul challenges the church to let their salvation affect their understanding of community or relationship. Here in this discussion, I will try to give you some benefits of some of the things I do in my research work, and that is where the social sciences and the things we learn from social sciences affect how we read the text.

In this particular text that we are discussing, there is a major issue that is actually expressed in the text, and part of what I will communicate here will help you to be able to actually understand what is going on here. To be able to talk about a community, we have to understand how it functions. I'll give you an example.

Our identity as individuals always has a lot to play in how we belong to a community. In social scientific studies, one of the things we observe is that there are three areas that determine how we construct who we are. One is cognitive.

The way we think about who we are and the things that shape how we think to be who we are. If your dad was telling you are great, you are handsome, you are beautiful, you are wonderful, you believe it, and it shapes your sense of self. That is the cognitive part.

The other part is what we call the affective dimension. The affective dimension is the sense of belonging. The part that makes us feel we belong to a particular group.

So, as we grow up, if we are growing up in a very strong family, what we begin to realize is that we feel loved, we feel cared for, and when we are around people we feel so loved by one of the things that comes to our mind is that we are not like the others. We also construct our identity with our sense of belonging. The third part is what we call the evaluative dimension.

And we begin to demarcate between us and others. What makes us, and what makes them them? And in so doing, we are not necessarily showing overt strong prejudice, but the way we construct our self-identity by its nature makes us get into the process of elimination to evaluate who we are versus them.

So, a person who did not grow up with a father or a parent reinforcing that they love them and care about them may be living feeling they don't belong. A person who did not grow up in a strong sense of family perhaps may always be struggling to be able to fit in because they don't know what makes them them versus others. In Ephesians 2, we will see how these things are playing out in the way that individual social identities affect the way they belong to a group.

And how in the church in Ephesus and the vicinity where you have Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles may be perhaps made up of Romans and Greeks; we know that Apollos, for instance, from Alexandria, was in Ephesus, so maybe some North Africans in the church in Ephesus. So, a church that is made up of all these multi-ethnic, multi-racial backgrounds all come with individual social identities, and within that, they could cause trouble, or they could strengthen the community.

I teach at a college in the United States, and we are recording these lectures at the moment. It is a great school to attend and a great school to send your son or daughter to. I want to make sure you know that.

It's called Gordon College. At Gordon College, we have a small number of students who are from Africa or from Asia. You see, the identity construction is shaped a

certain way, and one of the things we do is try to help them understand what we call the superordinate identity.

Where they actually bring their own social identity and feel a strong sense of belonging to the bigger identity of a community called Gordon Community. Paul was doing that in this verse. But before we get there, you know I want to get you going with some thinking.

So, let me pose some questions and get you thinking. Okay. Let's think about identity and belonging.

How do you think these areas affect your sense of identity and belonging? How people speak to you, the attitude they show to you, your sense of looks, race, body marks, index, your height or the way the things you wear. What do you look for, for instance, in a church as an indicator that there is true love and unity in that church? Thinking about the first question. I am a black guy from Africa living in the United States.

If I come to your area and I'm wearing baggy pants and I have some shiny chains on, and my pants are almost falling apart to the standard, I need to hold my belt to keep it up. Don't you think that will affect how you understand or perceive me and how you relate to me? I like to tell some of those guys to pant up and man up. But the point is that if I do that, that will affect how you perceive me.

When you go to a church, what makes you feel you belong there? What do you look for to make you feel you belong there? I have been closely observing one church in Massachusetts. Three years ago, I realized the minority numbers in this church, a big size church, were very, very small. And then two pastors in particular, one Spanish, one black, came on board.

Suddenly, I realized that in all the services, the numbers of blacks and Spanish are increasing. I wish people could see Christ and feel a sense of belonging. But the reality is they look for the things I mentioned to you earlier.

They look for people who have certain things, certain qualities that make them think about themselves a certain way. They look for people who they say, oh, they look like me, so I feel like I belong. And then they begin to construct themselves between us and them.

And as if you think what I'm saying is a modern-day thing. Let's think about Ephesians chapter 2, verses 11 to 22 in the light of this. In remembering the divide that we will read about in this letter, keep in mind what I call four indicators in ethno-race relations.

Then, we look at the test, recalling gentile exclusion. In the four indicators, look at these kids. One of the things I want to remind you in ethno-race relations, in other words, in a church in Ephesus where you have Jews, you have Gentiles, you have Romans, perhaps Greeks and Africans, you have to know that there is bound to be ethno-social stereotypes.

In the church in Ephesus, there was something like that, and Paul will address it. As Christians as they are, oh yes, as much as they can claim the Holy Spirit has at work in them, let's not have that issue. The Spanish people say, we are the Spanish people. We are going for this particular meeting.

We are black folks, and we are going to go to this. Why don't you invite everybody else? Social identity construction is playing out. There is also what we call, or what I have called as well, verbal constructions or labeling.

When we are trying to define or evaluate who we are versus the other person, we label them. We call them black folks, and we call them Spanish, we call them illegal immigrants, we call them white folks, we call them all kinds of names, we call them gypsies when I'm in Europe, we call them all kinds of names to begin to stereotype. So, we construct a language that we refer to actually demarcates between them and us.

In this test, we will find out, Paul will say, there are some who call others the uncircumcision. They call them, yeah, when they met, they called them those who are not circumcised. And you just need to know, if you forgot earlier in these lectures, I drew your attention to the whole issue of circumcision.

It was not a cool thing to be in a gentile city like Ephesus. Maybe you want to participate in the public baths, and you are a man. If you are circumcised, that is no good news.

In the 21st century, you say, what is the matter? Oh, it was a matter. In the 21st century, you may rather tease someone if you are in America who is not circumcised. If you are in Eastern Europe, maybe you may be surprised to see that it's a mix.

Or, in some parts of Europe, it's a mix, so it's not a big deal. But in the ancient world, being circumcised was not a good thing. But one of the things I find interesting in Ephesians is this.

The minority in Ephesus who are actually part of the big church are actually the ones who are stereotyping the majority. Why? Jesus was a Jew. He was our man.

You guys are trying to be part of us, and you are not circumcised. Imagine the minority trying to actually stereotype and label the majority in a church. But it was happening.

The other part of distinction in terms of social identity that is often made is what I call the religious status or religious demarcations. We like to say, oh, they are Muslims, and we are Christians. Oh, they are Baptists, and we are Pentecostals.

Oh, they are Baptists and Methodists. They are Catholics, and we are Presbyterians. I find it interesting, though, now, that in Europe and in America and some places, by necessity, because they are going broke financially, now you find Presbyterians and Methodists fellowshipping in the same building.

Oh, years ago, they would fight. That is good. They just figured something out.

They just figured out Christ is what matters. Social identity issues emerge. You want to be aware of that.

Sometimes, stereotyping is based on citizenship. And when we get so far in stereotyping in that regard, believe it or not, we don't even want to know more before we stereotype the other person. We just have to hear that the person is called Schmidt.

And we say, that's a German. We want to hear that somebody is called Smith. And we say, oh, that is American.

We want to hear that somebody is called Van der Sar. We say, oh, that guy is from Dutch Netherlands. This person, oh, no, from Holland.

You should be careful. Or maybe you get a name that you say that person is a Scandinavian. Oh, they are liberal social folks.

Stereotyping. It was so real in the church. And I'll show you it is so real in our text.

Now that you have these indicators I have given you let's read through the text and see how ethno-sexual stereotypes occur. How the Jews were stereotyping the Gentiles. Look at the verbal construction.

Paul was saying they call. Look, note that. Look at the religious stereotype.

They will say they are apart from Christ and without God. Citizenship. They don't belong to the citizenship of Israel.

If you think some of the issues we face in today's churches are new, welcome to a wonderful group of people called church. We are sinners saved by grace. And it's important we are reminded where God took us from so that in our construction of identities and sense of belonging, we can understand and comprehend with a high degree of appreciation what God is doing in His church.

Let's read Ephesians 2, verses 11 to 22. Therefore, remember that at one time, you Gentiles in the flesh were called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands. Remember that you were at that time religious, demarcated now, separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel or citizenship of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But, verse 13, now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself, for He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandment expressed in ordinances that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And He came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near.

Note verse 18 onwards. For through Him, we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So then, you are no longer strangers or aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built in the foundation of the apostles and prophets Christ Himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In Him, you are also being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. With all this stereotyping, Paul now begins to get to the church and say, let's begin to get on this straight. In your pre-Christian past, you all needed salvation by grace.

God gave you one opportunity to belong to a new community. And maybe this is where I need to clarify something here. In Romans, Paul argues that Gentiles are added to the Jews.

The context was that this was predominantly a Gentile church. The Gentiles were more likely to intimidate the Jews. The context was not a very super friendly environment for the Jews.

And so, Paul needed to remind the Roman church that, indeed, Jews have a significant place in God's salvation plan. And so, he would use the word drafted. The Gentiles have been drafted into God's household of faith.

Inefficiency. The minority group, the Jews, are the ones stereotyping against the Gentiles. They are the ones calling them names.

Paul is going to make a case here that they all have equal standing with Christ. The language of adding on is not going to show up in efficiency. Inefficiency, it is as if Paul is constructing a third race where Jews and Gentiles become one in the household of God with all the qualifications and privileges thereof.

That is Paul's way of trying to mute the Jews down a little bit. In Romans, he needed to calm the Gentiles down, and he needed to remind them that unity in the body of Christ, solidarity in the body of Christ, is essential. And it crosses all these ethno-racial lines.

So, having said that, let's go to this passage in Ephesians 2, verses 11-12. You were Gentiles in the flesh, Paul says. According to Jewish standards, you were unclean.

And Paul writes about this as a statement of fact. In other words, Paul is not saying, look, they call you all this; they stereotype all this, and you are not. He says, look, guys, you know.

You know that you were Gentiles in the flesh. At least, that's how we think. It's not a secret to you, and it's who you are.

And you were labeled. You were called the uncircumcision. You need to know that we had clear, deep issues.

All the Jewish community had clear, deep issues with you. You were the uncircumcision. You were the mark of the covenant.

And your religious standing was marked by hopelessness and godlessness. Paul says, you were without hope in Christ. And you were without God.

Wow. Paul wanted to crush any form of pride in the Gentiles. But he also wanted to point out that he is not by any means giving Jews some higher privilege in the church.

The Gentiles had come from a pagan background. And all the garbage that comes with it. All the religious activities, all the pagan rituals, and all the pagan activities that they would normally indulge in.

Paul wanted them to know that. When he says they were without God, they were without true God. It doesn't mean they did not have any God to worship.

They had Artemis. They had Demeter. They had the Temple of Zeus in Ephesus.

They have 50 pagan shrines in Ephesus alone. Outside Ephesus, we don't know what the number will be. In people's homes, we don't know the gods they will be worshipping.

They believe in the false gods. And by Jewish standards, they did not have a true God. And therefore, they are what, in Greek, Paul would call Atheos.

Without God. The word from which we have our Atheist concept. Paul goes on to clarify that they should remember that while they were marked in this hopelessness and godlessness, they were apart from Christ.

They were excluded from the citizenship of Israel. As far as their immigration status is concerned, they were strangers and foreigners to the covenant of promise. They were strangers.

In fact, some translators will use the word aliens. The two words Paul uses there for strangers and foreigners actually carry the sense that one word has to do with someone who has a temporary residence in a town, and the other one is someone who has a temporary stay in somebody's home. In other words, they have no permanent place to call home.

Their sense of identity and social identity, as well as their social stability in the place, was not good. Paul says they need to know as Gentiles, this is who they were. And they need to remember that.

Because if they don't remember that, they can come to the church and play all these politics. But for unity to prevail in the church, they need to remember where God took them from and who God has made them. They were hopeless.

And then God intervened, verse 13. The intervention took place, but now in Christ Jesus. You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

God intervened in a very, very costly way by the blood of Christ. Wow. Let me point out some of these things to you here.

In verse 13. The radical change takes effect, but now. But now.

But now in the new framework in Christ, in a sphere where Christ is Lord. The distances have been eliminated. The hopelessness have been removed.

And this has happened by the blood of Christ. It was costly. It cost God a lot.

And so, as a community working together, it really becomes important that members of this new community begin to now focus on Christ. And as he goes on to try to

explain what Christ has done, he's now going to tackle an issue in a way that should not make the Jews very, very happy, but they need to understand that this is important for them to know. Verse 14 to verse 18.

For he himself, Christ is our peace. Who has made both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 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.

And might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who are near. For through him, we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

Note in this passage how often he used the word we both. We have become one. We have one access to try to highlight what has just happened.

In Christ Jesus, the divide between Jews and Gentiles has crumpled down. God in Christ has broken the wall of hostility. Whatever psychological framework and mindset that makes us feel we are special than the other.

In Christ, God has broken that. In terms of affection and affective, what will make us feel in our sense of belonging that we do not belong to them, it is them and not us, has been broken because we are all in Christ.

An evaluative sense is what will make us construct ourselves as we are Jews and they are Gentiles; all have been broken down. Now, our true identity is that we are one in Christ. When we go to verse 19, he even introduces a new concept that those who did not have the citizenship of Israel with all Jews have now become members of the household of God.

Wow. Wow. If you were a Jew, Paul is crushing so many things you have on your mind that made you special.

But understand what is going on here. It is in Christ. He is our peace.

And he came to proclaim peace. I mentioned earlier in this lecture, one of the hymns I learned way back when I was in Catholic school. Peace, perfect peace.

In this dark world of sin, the blood of Jesus whispers peace. Peace within. I had a distinct privilege to serve in Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina soon after the war.

At one point there were UN workers, so there were a few blacks and people of different ethnic origins. When the UN workers left, I had a distinct privilege, I should emphasize, to work with my colleagues who are believers in Christ Jesus. Most cases,

perhaps I should say in almost all cases, I was the only black man in front of them and with them.

I remember when the decision was made that the Christian church in a village or small town called Beli Manastir had to start after the war. But in this town, 50% were Serbs and 50% were Croats. My friends trusted me.

They told me they would have a brother, an elder from another church, Zvonko, to lead the team, but he's a Croat. But it is clear that I am Suriname in their language, I am black. The Serbs would know that I am not a Serb.

The Croats would know that I am not a Croat. I also had an opportunity to help start this church, which was running before the war. Preaching and serving in this church taught me lessons no university could ever have taught me.

I saw my brothers and sisters in Christ embrace me, and almost 100% of the time, I think they forgot that I am of a different race. I have the children sometimes come to me and say, D'Arco, my last name is the first name in this part of the world, the same spelling. They come to me and say, D'Arco, can we feel your hair? And I will sit down and let them feel my hair.

By the way, at that time, I had more hair on my head than I do now. I've lost most of it, if not all of it. Serving together with my Croatian brothers serving together with my Bosnian brothers when I was in East Mosta, which was predominantly Muslim and more Serbian oriented, and my translator is a Croat. It is the brothers and sisters there who would encourage me so that we give my translator a different name, because his life could be at stake if people knew that a Croat was translating for that black guy in that church.

I was blessed. I saw what is going on in Ephesians face to face. I am a black man who, for years, sometimes forgot that I am a black man because everybody around me is white, and I don't even have anyone to compare whether the color is the same or not.

Paul is breaking down all those ethno-racial boundaries because, for him, as to my colleagues in former Yugoslavia, we are brothers in Christ, and in fact, the pastors will often call each other brothers. Wow! Christ is our peace. He came to proclaim peace in a fragile time, such as the mid-90s in former Yugoslavia.

Croats, Bosnians, Serbians, who are Christians, we are working together, and they are embracing their strange African guy with strange accent, who gives some of them terrible hard time to translate, when they have to translate when I am preaching. But you see, this is what I was trying to tell you in the beginning about social identity, understanding Christ as our peace. For this part of the world, it was real.

I remember a woman came to me one day at the monastery after church, after speaking on Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive our trespasses or those who sin against us. The woman came to me and said, Brother, pull me to the side, speak in your language, and ask me this question. How do you forgive the one whom you know killed your son, and lives a couple of blocks away from you? I paused and said, I don't know.

I don't know how, but I know why. Because forgiving is good for her, because Christ calls us to forgive, in Christ, we can live at peace within.

I don't think I satisfied this woman entirely, but living, she reminded me that peace as we know it as Christians, is different from how the world knows it. Christ is our peace, and he came to preach peace. Christ, our peace, he made both Gentiles and Jews one, and he did this by destroying the dividing wall, by destroying the venom, by destroying the bone of contention.

He did this by abolishing the law and taking away all obstacles on the way, which would rob people of experiencing the peace that the Prince of Peace has to offer. Christ is our peace. What is the goal? You know, I like to illustrate things vividly.

I like to put the cross of Christ in the middle, and as you look at the cross of Christ in the middle of this diagram I put there, I want you to remember something here. I am not putting Christ in the middle, making peace in the concept of the Protestant cross. You know, in a Protestant theology, we put a cross without the body, because we want to talk about the cross symbolizing that that is where our sin was taken away, but we don't want the body on it because we want to celebrate the resurrection.

We need to be careful, though, lest we get too triumphalistic. In Catholic theology, which emphasizes suffering and the suffering of Christ, I wish they emphasized resurrection more, too, but they like to put the body of Jesus on the crucifix. When I illustrate how Christ made peace, I want to make sure that I don't show you the cross without the man, Jesus Christ, on that cross.

Ephesians says It was by His blood. He did this in His flesh. It was painful.

A price was paid. God's only begotten Son died for that peace to take place. Wow.

Christ is our peace. He has created one community made up of Jews and Gentiles, and He has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God. One of the interesting things about this passage is that often, when we talk about reconciliation, we talk about reconciliation as if Paul is teaching about how human beings reconcile to each other, how Jews and Gentiles sit on a table and negotiate.

No. For Paul in Ephesians, reconciliation does not occur, and he does not use the word reconciliation for Jews and Gentiles. In us, in His flesh, He reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God.

What is the main point here? The main point is this. If only we all have a true relationship with God, if only our understanding of God cognitively is strong and firm that we all belong to one Father who is in heaven if we all have that understanding that our truest identity is that we are all made in the image and likeness of God, if only the sins and the prejudices that mar our relationship with God that bless our vision to be able to understand and see things the way God sees them, were all erased. We will know, we will begin to realize that the Jew or the Gentile is a brother, a sister, a fellow believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, our social frictions within the community of faith would not exist if we all had a good relationship with God. So, in His flesh, He reconciled us to God. That is where we need reconciliation to straighten things up.

And if only that reconciliation takes effect well, then we will indeed be able and so easily relate with our brothers and sisters. Look at verse 14 again. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandment expressed in ordinances that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two.

So, making peace might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. You notice how much He talks about breaking down and killing the hostility. Yes, Paul wanted to make sure that we do not lose sight of what God is doing in and among His people.

If we forget where we were saved from, then we will allow our ethnic identity and our racial identity to get in the way of our truest superordinate identity, namely, citizens of the kingdom of God and members of the family of God. Paul says we are one. He broke all this down.

You know, salvation in this sense in Paul in Ephesians chapter 2 has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. He reconciled us to God so as to make it possible for us to live at peace with one another. Christ is the author of this peace.

Verse 17, He proclaimed peace. Verse 14a, He Himself is our peace. Verse 15, He makes peace.

He brings a sense of well-being. This is not only social, it is something that starts from within. It is the peace that includes a sense of belonging in this one family.

Christ proclaims peace. Let's unpack that a little bit. By saying Christ proclaimed peace, Paul is, in effect, saying He proclaimed peace.

To the far and near. To those who are close and those who are far away. God did not leave anyone out.

The Jews were close to God. The Gentiles were far off. But He has given them both the same assets.

He did this in Him. And through Him, He has given both assets in one spirit to the Father. He has granted them this sense of boldness, the ability to reach out to God in one spirit.

The imagery is this. If for one minute somebody thought others were so distant from God and could not have the benefits or the easy access to God, Paul says, because of what Christ has done, both can now have access to God in one spirit. I'm reminded at the time, I think it was 2002 in Ghana, I was at a meeting with the president of Regent University.

My daughter was, at the time, around two and a half years old, my first daughter. The receptionist told me my daughter came to the door and said, Mom says dad is here. And she said, yes, Dad is here.

And the receptionist knows the protocol and what it takes to get access to the president. This was a president whom you had to go through two people to get to his office. The lady told me my daughter would not take no for an answer.

She said I want my dad. Yes, it's true, my daughter is daddy's girl. She came to the second lady, who then would be able to call the president's office and say somebody wants to see you, and then the president would say, let a person come in, I'm engaged or something.

And when she came to the second lady, the lady told me, your daughter will ask where my dad is, not whether I can see my dad. And she said, you know, your dad is at a meeting, you can sit here. She wants to play with her.

She won't take it. She was ready to throw tantrums if she doesn't give her access to her dad. And then she heard my voice.

That was the end of her conversation with her. She opened the door, ran straight in the middle of an important meeting and took her seat on my lap. I was embarrassed by that a little bit.

But you know what that reminds me? This is a girl who believes that access to her father is unrestricted and that no receptionist or secretary could stop her from having access to her father. For those of us who believe in Christ Jesus, we may be Jews; we may be Gentiles, but in Christ, he broke down the dividing wall of hostility and has given all of us access to the Father in one spirit. Nothing is hindering us; nothing is able to stop us from calling on him, reaching out to him, and going to him with all vulnerability, transparency, and sometimes naivety.

He has given us access in one spirit to the Father. You know, I like the father concept. If only you understand that, you understand the relational dimension here; if we are all connected to our father, then we understand the family dynamics that I'll be talking about in a few moments.

The nature of this new identity would then look like this. This new community is a community where there are no longer aliens and no longer strangers. That category is broken down in this community.

There are brothers and sisters. In this new community, the issue of citizenship is not an issue anymore. Why? Because they're not Jew, Roman, Gentile, no, we are all one in Christ.

We are now fellow citizens, Paul will argue. And just in case you think we are fellow citizens, we can live apart from each other, but we can live in the same country anyway, Paul will go on to argue that. Actually, in this new community, we are all members of the household of God.

We are all members of one household where God is the father to whom we have access, excuse me, in one spirit. Wow! We need to understand, and I hope you understand this, that the spirit is a very, very important concept in early Christianity. Understanding that the early church would say, if the spirit of God is at work in these Gentiles, then what should hinder us from us calling them one among us? Because what we experience is what they experience.

Paul says, you know what? These are your brothers and sisters. Work together. Your identity, your true identity, is a member of the household of God.

Who are the saints? As Paul mentioned in verse 19, let me read the text. So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Sometimes, the word saints has posed some questions people are speculating about.

Are the saints Israel or Jews? Does the saint refer to Jewish Christians? Does saint refer to the first Christians? Does saint refer to all believers? Some would even

speculate whether it refers to angels. The word saints, actually, is very straightforward. For Paul, they are set apart for God's use.

And so those who know God, those who know Christ are saints. But you want to know that this speculation is out there. I read this testament, and the saints refer to members of the household of God.

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jew, Gentile, white, yellow, black, red, short hair, no hair, whatever height, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are saints. In this framework, Paul will spell out how the household of God actually should look like.

It is the household, now in architectural parlance, built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets. Christ himself is the cornerstone. The word cornerstone can also be translated as capstone.

Capstone becomes the capstone that holds the building together, or the cornerstone becomes the strongest pillar that holds it firm. Now, more and more scholars are leaning towards the cornerstone. But you want to understand that Christ is the one who solidifies the stability of this household.

In Christ, the building is being fitted together. And it is growing. I'll read out to you in a minute.

It is growing into a holy temple. And it is growing into a holy temple in which God would dwell by the Spirit. In which God would dwell and make it his home.

Ending this session, let me read verses 19 to 22. So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.

In whom the whole structure being built together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him also are being built ongoing projects, being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. In other words, as the church of God, break down the walls of the ethno-racial divide, understand the centrality of Christ Jesus, and work together as citizens of God's household.

They are in the process of building and forming a house in which God himself will find comfort in resting by his Spirit. The imagery that comes to mind is the temple as dedicated by Solomon. And the whole place was filled with smoke and the glory of God was present.

When the church is living in unity, great things happen. Paul will continue to tell us something about what unity does. And the damage of this sense of unity when prevailing in a church that happens even against the principalities and powers.

I hope that in studying this test, you probably realize, as I told you earlier, that it took a great deal to bring some sociological dimensions to this conversation and shed light on how we approach this test. I hope you understand that in Christ, we are all one. If you are in Nigeria, in Christ, there's no distinction between the Igbo and the Yoruba.

There's no distinction between all the various tribes. If you are in Ghana, there's no distinction between the Akan and the Ewe. We are all one in Christ.

Let us not always talk about this subject when we talk about the Western world in terms of black and white. We know that in the Spanish world, we discriminate on the basis of skin color, lighter skin and darker skin. In Christ, those distinctions don't exist.

We are all made in the image and likeness of God. We were all trapped and dead in sin and trespasses. He saved us to make us belong, to make us belong to his household.

When we hold on to the peace that Christ has offered us, realizing that it is costly, we leave it out with our brothers and sisters in the house of God. Thank you for following up on this discussion with us. And I hope that as we continue to study in this biblical study series, some things will become clearer or that you will at least have a starting point from which you can learn more about this subject matter.

God bless you. And I look forward to continuing this with you. Thank you.

This is Dr. Dan Darko in his lecture series on the Prison Epistles. This is session 23, New Community in Christ, Ephesians 2:11-22.