

**QUEEN OF THE EPISTLES - CORNERSTONE**  
**MATTHEW 7:24-27 / EPHESIANS 2:11-22**  
**2026-01-25**

We're into the fourth week of our series, the Queen of the Epistles, written by Paul while in prison in Rome near the end of his career. Having finished the contentious issues in his writing to the Colossians, Paul set to write a positive letter, fundamental and the great doctrine of his life —**the unity of all humanity in Christ and God's purpose for the world through the Church**. We're going to double down on those themes this morning as we delve into the last ½ of chapter two.

When Stephen was stoned to death, the church scattered due to persecution (Acts 7) and the Gospel spread with them—quickly. What had been an exclusively Jewish sect to that time was adopted by Gentiles who realized the Gospel was for everyone. But seeing the Gospel as being for all people was considered heresy by the Jews. To Paul's bitter sorrow, he saw his doctrine of Christian freedom erected a new barrier against the conversion of the Jews. Splitting the Church into Jewish-Gentile factions was fatal; Christianity, was intended to heal the world's divisions, not exacerbate them.

From chapter one Paul showed us that **WE WERE CHOSEN BY GOD** before the beginning of the world. It was always God's plan to confer salvation on us. We've been in God's plans forever.

Then he shared **THE PLAN OF GOD**: "He predestined us for **adoption** as sons/daughters through Jesus." How could God convey in any deeper way His love and care for us or the privilege He gives us to be full family members than adopting us? Jesus took us out of the power of sin and took us into His power then equipped you to be who He wants you to be. So, unexpectedly and surprisingly, as believers we find ourselves participating in God's eternal plan.

Then Paul spoke of two of **THE GIFTS OF GOD**: **Christ redeemed** (delivered) **us** through His blood and second, there is **forgiveness** for each of us because of Jesus. Instead of dreading God's judgment, Jesus enabled us to understand the love of God.

Then Paul shared **THE GOAL OF HISTORY**: **Christ is God's mystery revealed** and His love and care, His grace and mercy are meant for all the world. Jesus came into the world to wipe out all divisions. And all history has been a working out of this process, working out the will of God. The purpose of all life is found in, is central to, and rests in Christ. You and I belong to God.

The knowledge of God's will unites and brings all things together in Christ; It is the mission of the church to make Jesus known. God's plan for the world is in the hands of the church. Jesus is counting on every one of us to bring about the unity of all people—why Jesus came.

We focused on the grace of God last week. Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our transgressions...” God infused us; we did nothing. Grace: all God. He airlifted us from death to life.

As believers in Jesus, and as a part of God’s plan to confer salvation on us from the beginning of time, we’ve been seated with Christ in heaven. It’s a done deal! Because of the incomparable riches of His grace—undeserved, unattainable favour of God. This precious gift of God.

So, you’ve been saved by grace, through faith, but this faith isn’t even from you. Somehow, we need to believe, but it’s not to our credit. God is the author and the owner of faith. Some how we slide into His will and become the benefactors of the faith He gives. We just accept it.

Works have nothing to do with “earning” salvation. However, we are recreated by God for good works. All the good works in the world can’t put us right with God. But there’s something very wrong if a Christian’s not engaged in good works. Long beforehand He prepared the kind of life He wants us to live. We won’t earn it but we can show how grateful we are for God’s love by seeking with our whole hearts to live the kind of life which brings joy to God’s heart.

To get a better grasp of today’s Scripture, you really need to go back to the time it was written, to have a feel for what life—particularly spiritual life was like for the Gentiles before Christ came. Though Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, he never forgot the unique place of the Jews in the design and the revelation of God.

The Gentiles were collectively called the uncircumcision. This was the first of the great divisions. The barrier between Jew and Gentile was absolute. For example, if a Jew married a Gentile a funeral would be held for the Jew. Such interaction was the equivalent of death.

In life before Christ, Gentiles had no hope of a Messiah. For the Jews, history always had a direction. Gentile history, on the other hand, was going nowhere. To the Jew, history was a march to God, the way to greater life. With the coming of Christ, the Gentile entered into that “new” view of history, in which humanity was always on the way to God. For us, after Christ’s earthly walk, we’ve never really had to think that way, because, after Christ, we can feel (and in fact we are) included in God’s way.

The Bible uses the word *alien* to describe Gentiles, while the Jews were referred to as holy people—again, holy, meaning different. How so? Different, because their only king was God. Israel was a theocracy. Their Governor was God. To be an Israelite was to have a citizenship which was divine. So every Israelite was a citizen of God and when they spoke to each other they spoke to the people of God. By contrast, the Gentiles were strangers to the covenants on which God’s promises were based. (*I will take you for My people and I will be your*

*God—Exodus 6:7*) It was not only a privilege but required the obligation of following the Law. The unsaid portion here is, that if God's design was ever to be worked out, it had to be worked out through a nation. But the Gentiles were without hope and without God before Christ came to give him hope.

And that's why Paul spoke of those who were far off who have been brought near. That was the expression rabbis used of the convert to Judaism—that they had been brought near. With Christ, the door is shut to no one. So this is the section of Paul's letter where he centres on the dividing wall. The middle wall of the barrier has been torn down. It's a reference to the temple. We spoke of that a few weeks ago. The court of the Gentiles was the outside court, the one farthest away from the Holy of Holies. It was a penalty of death for a Gentile to move beyond the outer court. When Jesus died, the temple curtain was rent, torn in two. The barrier was gone.

The ancient world had its barriers. Today, we know a little bit about barriers too, don't we?. The barrier between the haves and the have-nots grows wider with each passing day. If you have any doubt about that talk to Dave or Marg or Mary Lou when she returns. And the haves spend a lot of time and energy keeping the have-nots in their place. In any Christ-less society there can be nothing but middle walls of partition. But Paul says that in Christ these barriers are down. Just how did Christ destroy them?

Paul says of Jesus, "*He is our peace.*" When two parties are at odds with each other, the surest way to bring them together is through someone who they both love and respect. That is what Christ does. Through a common love for Him, people come to love each other. That peace is won at the price of His blood. The cross awakens the hearts of people of all nations to a love for Christ. Only when they all love Christ will they love each other. There can be peace only in Jesus Christ.

Today's passage also makes the startling statement that Jesus has wiped out the law of the commandments. As you probably know, the Jews believed that only by keeping the law was a person able to be in right relationship with God. But no one could do it—over 600 Levitical laws broken down into thousands and thousands of commandments—washing hands a certain way, washing dishes a certain way, a gazillion things you could/couldn't do on the Sabbath... Christ is the end of the law (Roman 10:4). Jesus ended legalism; in its place He put the love of God and love of people.

Here's a good story—Wm. Barkley, pg. 115. [*A story is told about three allied soldiers who were the closest of friends, and who were fighting in France during World War 2. One of them was killed, and his friends wanted to bury his body in a special place, and not just in the field.*

*So they brought the body of their dead friend to a beautiful French churchyard that had a cemetery within it. They asked the priest for permission to bury their friend there, and the priest asked them if he had been a Catholic. "No," they said, "he hadn't." The priest said that the man*

*could not be buried in the consecrated grounds of the church, since it was reserved only for Catholics.*

*So the two men took the body of their friend and did the next best thing – they buried him just outside the fence of the churchyard.*

*The next day in the morning, the two friends went back to the church to pay their final respects to the friend that they had buried. But when they looked outside the fence, where they thought they had buried their friend, they could not find the simple grave. And so they went and knocked on the priest's house.*

*“We cannot find the grave of our friend at all!” they said, “We buried him just outside the fence.*

*“Yes,” said the priest, “I could not sleep last night thinking of your friend and the love you have for him. I tossed and turned, until I decided what I had to do. I got up in the night and moved the fence.”]*

That is what love can do. Rules and regulations put up the fence but love moved it. Jesus removed the fences between people because he abolished all religion based on rules and regulations and brought people together on a foundation of love.

There are priceless gifts which come with the new unity in Christ. Both Jew and Gentile are made into one new being. The unity which Jesus achieves isn't the blotting out of all racial characteristics. It's accomplished by making the people of all nations Christian. Unity is found that way. The oneness in Christ is in Christ and not any external change. Second, Jesus reconciled both Gentile and Jew to God—bringing together two groups who had been estranged from each other. God is the friend of both and therefore they must be friends with each other. Through Jesus, there is a place for everyone in the family of God. We need to be sure we don't put up any barriers for people, that we don't become more exclusive than God. We've been guilty of that in the past and sadly, also in the present.

Paul pictures each of us as a stone built into the church. And of course, of the whole church, Jesus is the cornerstone—the stone that holds everything together.

What exactly is a cornerstone? It is the foundation stone or the setting stone—the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation. All other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure. Over time a cornerstone became a ceremonial masonry stone set in a prominent location on the outside of a building, with an inscription indicating the construction dates of the building and the names of architect, builder and other significant individuals. In either case, for us Christians, there is only one cornerstone and only one name on the cornerstone and that is Jesus.

Each part of the building is fitted into Christ. This illustration returns to the overall theme: the building is a unity because through it all, it has been used for the worship of God and

for meeting with Jesus. Our unity isn't from our liturgy or organization or our habitual way of doing things; it comes from Jesus. The church will be unified when it provides a home where the Spirit of Christ can dwell and where everyone who loves Christ can meet in that Spirit.

So, your assignment this week is simple or not so simple, be lovingly unifying with everyone you meet—for Christ's sake.