

THE SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY

Church is a supernatural community. Why is it supernatural? Because no community on earth is like the community of God. The church is supernatural because it is supernaturally born of God.

What's so supernatural about the church of God?

ILLUSTRATION:

John got a transfer, and he had to shift from Bangalore to Hyderabad with his entire family. John and his wife, Ruth, were concerned about finding a good, biblical church. In their search, they were glad to find a church not too far from their residence. When they attended this church for the first time, they saw how believers greeted each other warmly. They were amazed to see that instead of rushing home after the closing prayer, people spent time with one another. They were impressed to see them eating together and conversing with one another. They also saw people having laughter and enjoying mutual fellowship. John and Ruth left the church with great joy that God has blessed them with a beautiful church.

Is this church really beautiful as it appears to be? Not so in the sight of the Holy Spirit. What could be the problem?

Some people in this church are close to one another because they belong to the same caste. Martha loves spending time with Rachel because they both come from a similar hometown. David enjoys hanging out with James because they both are software engineers. Matthew's and Paul's family invite one another to their homes and spend more time together because their families are from a similar wealthy class. Samantha and Sarah relish chatting with one another because they speak the same language. Timothy and Silas have gone through similar life experiences, so they often meet together for fellowship. Esther and Rebekah have much to talk to each other because they are singles. Samuel, Jonathan, Grace, and Lucy go out a lot together because they are more modern in their lifestyle, while Abi, Joel, Mary, and Mercy associate with one another because they are more traditional. And some, in this church, feel left alone because they don't find any who are compatible to them.

What is the basis of these people's fellowship? None of all these people verbally confess what their basis of fellowship is. What seems to be a beautiful church to others, in fact, is a grievous sight before God.

Why?

Because the Gospel of Christ is not the core basis of their fellowship but natural affinities (natural liking). It is not they being clothed with Christ which is an attraction to one another but they being clothed with common similarities. **They are disinterested and don't engage in other believers' lives who are dissimilar to them.** Honestly, this church is not built on gospel-centered relationships, but on human, natural affinities.

How about our church?

Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop in "The Compelling Community": "When Christians unite around something other than the gospel, they create community that would likely exist even if God doesn't...**Many relationships that naturally form in our churches would exist even if the gospel weren't true...We should aspire for many relationships that exist only because of the gospel.**"

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:11-22,

Background: In 2:1-10, after speaking generally to all believers about their deadness in sins and salvation by grace through faith, Paul now specifically addresses to Gentile believers (2:11-22) about their oneness with the Jewish believers. In the following chapter 3, Paul continues to speak about the mystery of the Gospel, which is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Why did Paul write these words?

Paul wrote this letter from prison. Paul planted this church in Acts 18 & 19. The church in Ephesus consisted of both Jewish and Gentile believers. The Gentile believers seem to have an inferior view of themselves while the Jewish believers appear to have a superior view of themselves. The newly converted Jews possibly separated themselves from their Gentile brethren. The unity of the church, particularly between Jew and Gentile believers, was at stake.

I want to highlight three factors from Ephesians 2:11-22,

I. THE NATURAL BREACH BETWEEN JEWS AND GENTILES

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—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.

“You Gentiles”

- The ancient rabbis divided the world into two, Jews (physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac) and Gentiles (non-Jewish, uncircumcised).

You Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision (the Jews), which is made in the flesh by hands,

- In **Genesis 17:10-14**, circumcision was the external sign of being a part of God’s covenant community, a covenant made to Abraham. Circumcision is the removal of the foreskin from the male penis.

¹² **remember that you were at that time** (five marks of their pre-conversion state):

i. Separated from Christ,

- Christ-less, with no Messianic hope of Savior and Deliverer

ii. Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel,

- Excluded from the fellowship and privileges of being God’s chosen people

iii. and Strangers to the covenants of promise,

- Foreigners to Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenant promises

iv. Having no hope

- No hope of escape from current sinful state and eternal condemnation

v. and without God in the world (from “atheos” comes the word “atheist”)

- No relationship with the living God (not that they didn’t believe in the concept of God)

Remember—we all are Gentiles (this was our condition too)

Greek scholar William Barclay helps us feel the alienation between the two communities, and the deep seated hostility (enmity) between them, especially on the Jewish side: “The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. ‘The Gentiles’, said the Jews, ‘were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell.’ ‘God’, they said, ‘loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made ...’ It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death.”

Bible expositor Steve J Cole explains the enmity between Jews and Gentiles: “While the Jews were God’s chosen people because of His grace alone, not because of anything meritorious in them (Deut. 9), they had become proud and had developed an intense hatred for the Gentiles. They viewed them as uncircumcised dogs. They shook the dust off their feet after traveling in Gentile territory before coming back to the Holy Land, so as not to defile the land. They would never eat with a Gentile. Even Gentile converts to Judaism had to keep their distance in the temple.”

Who could break this natural breach of hostility between Jews and Gentiles? This was humanly impossible.

2. THE SUPERNATURAL UNION THROUGH THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Ephesians 2:¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 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 ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

v.13 “But now in Christ Jesus” in contrast to **v.11 “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ...”** Christ did two supernatural (naturally impossible) works:

2.1 RECONCILIATION (OF BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES) TO GOD, THE FATHER

Reconciliation: Bringing peace to a hostile relationship

- ❖ ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been **brought near** by the blood of Christ.
- ❖ ¹⁶ and might reconcile us **both to God** in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility

John Stott: Here (v.16) the ‘hostility’ is clearly between God and men

Romans 5:10 says that we were enemies of God...due to sin

- ❖ ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit **to the Father**.

Question: Do we Gentiles take the advantage of this reconciliation by seeking to cultivate an intimate relationship with God or take it for granted?

2.2 RECONCILIATION WITH ONE ANOTHER (JEWS AND GENTILES):

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** ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances (Mosaic Law)¹, that he might **create in himself one new man** in place of the two...

¹⁴ “**who has made us both one**”—united us together

- ❖ Bible scholars say that in Greek it literally means “he has made both things into one thing” **NO TWO DIFFERENT PEOPLE BUT ONE PEOPLE OF GOD**
- ❖ **Galatians 3:28**, There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

¹⁴ “**Broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility**”

John Stott: Here the hostility was chiefly between Jew and Gentile

Paul was probably referring to a four-foot wall in the temple area that divided the Court of the Gentiles from where the rest of the Jews could worship. **On this wall**

¹ Jesus abolished both the regulations of the ceremonial law and the condemnation of the moral law (Stott).
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was an inscription: “No one of another nation to enter within the fence and enclosure round the temple. And whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues.” THIS HOSTILITY WAS BOTH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL.

¹⁵“**create in himself one new man in place of the two**” speaks about Christ creating a new humanity.

⇒ We are not only individually “a new creation” but also corporately “a new humanity” or “a new race.”

Observation: “in Himself” speaks that this supernatural union doesn’t happen for all Jews and Gentiles but only for those who are in Christ.

2.3 HOW DID CHRIST JESUS MADE THIS RECONCILIATION (SUPERNATURAL UNION) POSSIBLE?

Observation:

⇒ v.14, For He Himself is our peace

⇒ v.15, He made peace

⇒ v.17, He preached peace

❖ ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near **by the blood of Christ (sacrificial death for sins)**.

❖ ¹⁴ **For he himself is our peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down **in his flesh (sacrificial death for sins)** the dividing wall of hostility

❖ ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body **through the cross, (sacrificial death for sins)** thereby killing the hostility.

IT COST CHRIST HIS LIFE TO RECONCILE PEOPLE TO GOD AND TO UNITE JEWS AND GENTILES AS ONE PEOPLE OF GOD.

WHAT ELSE COULD BRING THEM TOGETHER?

CHRIST DIED ON THE CROSS TO PUT TO DEATH THE HOSTILITY. HIS BODY WAS PLOUGHED TO PULL DOWN THE WALL OF HOSTILITY. HE LET HIMSELF BE KILLED TO KILL THE HOSTILITY. ONLY THE GOSPEL HAS THE POWER TO DESTROY THE WALLS OF HOSTILITY.

3. THE SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY OF GOD

Why is church a supernatural community? What was naturally impossible (oneness of Jews and Gentiles), Christ made it possible (made them one, a supernatural community). **Church is a supernatural community which God redeemed by the blood of Christ in which all kinds of people come together and become one people of God.**

3.1 THE CHURCH IS A SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY AS GOD'S KINGDOM

⇒ At one time (v.11)

⇒ But now in Christ Jesus (v.13)

⇒ So then you are no longer (v.19)

❖ ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but **you are fellow citizens with the saints...(Old Testament Jewish saints)**

Note: Fellow (same) citizens and not second class citizens. This speaks about equal and eternal relationship/citizenship of Gentiles and Jews in the Kingdom of God.

3.2 THE CHURCH IS A SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY AS GOD'S FAMILY

❖ ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but **you are** [fellow citizens with the saints and] **members of the household of God**

Charles Swindoll: In the New Testament, the “household” referred to all those living under the same roof. It often included more than what we call the “nuclear family.” It might include parents, children, grandparents, grown sons with their own wives and children, even aunts and uncles. In other words, it included the “extended family.” This is a great picture of the new family of God, united under one Father through the person of Jesus Christ and held together by the bond of the Holy Spirit.

3.3. THE CHURCH IS A SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY AS GOD'S TEMPLE

❖ ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [PAUL NOW USES

THE ARCHITECTURE TERMS—FOUNDATION, CORNERSTONE, STRUCTURE, TEMPLE]

❖ ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (**the word of God in Christ was revealed to them in a unique way**), Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone (**the stone set in the foundations at the corner to which the rest of the stones are added and built**), ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being **JOINED TOGETHER (Gentiles and Jews)**, grows into **A HOLY TEMPLE IN THE LORD**. ²² In him you also are being **BUILT TOGETHER (Gentiles and Jews)** into **A DWELLING PLACE FOR GOD (HOLY TEMPLE)** by the Spirit.

Comment: God's presence dwells in a heterogeneous community (different kinds of people) and not in a homogenous community (one kind of people).

Point: The Church is a Supernatural Community of God. **Christ died not only for our individual sins but also to make all kinds of individuals as one body, one people, one family, and one temple of God.**

WHEN THIS IS WHAT GOD'S COMMUNITY IS, WHAT ARE WE DOING WHEN WE SEEK TO ASSOCIATE WITH ONLY SIMILAR KIND OF PEOPLE RATHER THAN BUILD LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE? AREN'T WE DESPISING THE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS AND MAKE GOD'S SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY APPEAR NATURAL LIKE THE COMMUNITIES OF THE WORLD?

Remember: If Christ could destroy the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, how careful we Gentiles must be in not erecting walls among ourselves?

Two gangrenes in God's Community: Antipathy (hostility) and Apathy (indifference)

In the church, we struggle to cultivate love relationship with one another due to:

⇒ **Caste wall in the church**

- When believers' relationship with one another is based on similar caste, does that testify about their natural affinities or the supernatural community bought by the blood of Christ?

⇒ **Class wall in the church**

- When believers' relationship with one another is based on similar class, does that testify about their natural affinities or the supernatural community brought by the blood of Christ?

⇒ **Professional wall in the church**

- When believers' relationship with one another is based on similar profession, does that testify about their natural affinities or the supernatural community brought by the blood of Christ?

⇒ **Color wall in the church**

- When believers' relationship with one another is based on similar color, does that testify about their natural affinities or the supernatural community wrought by the blood of Christ?

⇒ **Language wall in the church**

- When believers' relationship with one another is based on similar language, does that testify about their natural affinities or the supernatural community bought by the blood of Christ?

⇒ **Regional wall in the church**

- When believers' relationship with one another is based on similar region, does that testify about their natural affinities or the supernatural community bought by the blood of Christ?

⇒ **Educational wall in the church**

- When believers' relationship with one another is based on similar education, does that testify about their natural affinities or the supernatural community bought by the blood of Christ?

⇒ **Spiritual wall in the church**

- When believers' relationship with one another is based on similar spiritual level, does that testify about their natural affinities or the supernatural community bought by the blood of Christ?

⇒ **Hobbies wall in the church**

- When believers' relationship with one another is based on similar hobbies, does that testify about their natural affinities or the supernatural community bought by the blood of Christ?

⇒ **Non-central doctrinal wall**

- When believers' relationship with one another is based on similar doctrinal beliefs, does that testify about their natural affinities or the supernatural community wrought by the blood of Christ?

WE MUST BE GOSPEL-CENTERED IN OUR INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH.

As scholar D. A. Carson writes: The church itself is not made up of natural “friends.” It is made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything of the sort. Christians come together, not because they form a natural collocation, but because they have been saved by Jesus Christ... In this light, they are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus' sake. *(cited by Wilbourne, Rankin. Union with Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God . David C Cook. Kindle Edition.)*

❖ **Romans 12:16**, “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly (socially unimpressive).”

Note: It is the responsibility of those who are on a higher level to humble themselves and associate with those who are lower than them.

High class people must humble themselves and associate with low class people.

Highly educated people must humble themselves and associate with less educated ones.

Highly spiritually disciplined people must humble themselves and associate with less spiritually disciplines ones.

Why? For the sake of the Gospel

IS THIS WHAT WE WITNESS IN THE CHURCH?

Disclaimer: I am not claiming there is no room for similarities at all in the church. What I am claiming is that similarities are not the core basis of our existence

together, similarities are not the predominant deciding factor of our mutual fellowship, and **similarities do not bind a few together in close relationship by neglecting others in the church who are dissimilar (diverse).**

ALTHOUGH WE ARE NATURALLY ATTRACTED TO PEOPLE WHO ARE SIMILAR, KNOWING OUR IDENTITY IN THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, WE MUST **INTENTIONALLY** TAKE EFFORTS TO BUILD LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE DISSIMILAR IN ORDER TO REFLECT THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

Supernatural Community: The church is not a secular social club consisting people of similarities. The church a supernatural community in which high and low castes, rich and poor, blacks and whites, educated and uneducated, modern and traditional, professionals and non-professional workers, South Indians and North Indians, Telugus, Hindis, Tamilians, Malayalis, vegetarians and non-vegetarians, extroverts and introverts, employers and employees, great and small—**all kinds of people live as one body of Christ and one people of God.** This union and transformation is the result of Christ's substitutionary death on the cross for sins. **The core basis of interpersonal relationship in the church is not our similarities but the Gospel of Christ Jesus.**

Note: We cannot make the church supernatural. The Lord Jesus has already made it through the cross. It's only God's work, not man's work. We have to realize our identity and live accordingly.

THEREFORE, AS A MEMBER OF CHRIST'S CHURCH, DON'T DARE TO MAKE IT AND REFLECT IT AS A NATURAL AND WORLDLY COMMUNITY.

LET US LIVE A KIND OF COMMUNITY WHICH REFLECTS LOVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE.

LET THE WORLD WITNESS UNCOMMON RELATIONSHIP AMONG US BECAUSE OF ONE COMMON FACTOR, WHICH IS THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST JESUS.

LET US LIVE AS GOD'S SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY AND BUILD GOSPEL-CENTERED RELATIONSHIPS.