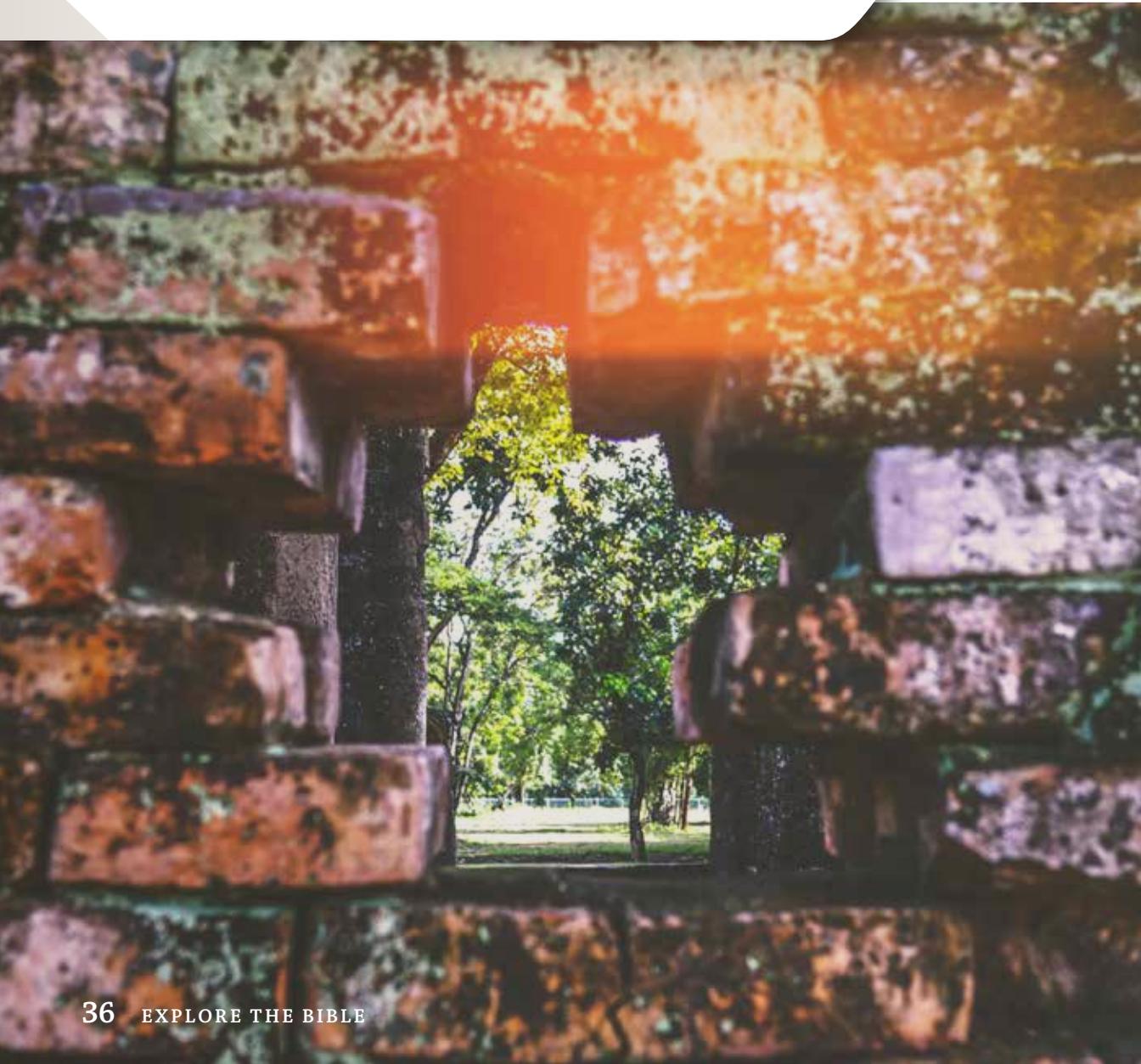


Session 4

Reconciled

God reconciles us to Himself in Christ, removing barriers of hostility between believers.

Ephesians 2:11-22



What are some of the biggest walls you have seen that separate people? What are some of the underlying issues that cause divisions between people and groups?

Divisions often run deep. Past injustices, current fears, and future imagined responses can contribute to the complexity of tensions. Adding to the complexity, people can be united on one front yet divided on another. Sports teams, shared work goals, and community events may bring diverse groups together yet not remove the divisions that exist away from that event or action. True reconciliation and unity are found in a shared belief in Christ.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Paul had previously stated the purpose of the great salvation that God brought to light through Christ: to “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph. 1:10). This is a majestic and magnificent statement, breathtaking in its redemptive scope. God’s purpose is that in Christ all believers find unity in Him, overcoming racial and cultural barriers because of the greatness of their common Savior. Because of our separation from God, we are at odds with one another. Since He is the source of all oneness, alienation from Christ always carries with it alienation from one another.

In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul set forth how Christ is the means by which we are brought back to God. He followed by drawing a rational inference from this great truth that, in Christ, we are brought back to each other. Later, in chapter 3, Paul will address the revealed mystery of the church as God’s means to accomplish His stated purpose. Therefore, while this new community of Christ followers is the divine instrument of bringing people to faith in Him, there is more. Faith in Christ is the path to reconciliation between people from different backgrounds, regions, and races. Therefore, there are social and relational dimensions to the church’s proclamation of the gospel.

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

11 So then, remember that at one time you were **Gentiles** **A** in the flesh — called “the uncircumcised” by those called “**the circumcised** **B**,” which is done in the flesh by human hands. **12** At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the **citizenship of Israel** **C**, and foreigners to the **covenants of promise** **D**, without hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the **blood of Christ** **E**. **14** For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, **15** he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself **one new man** **F** from the two, resulting in peace. **16** He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. **17** He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have **access** **G** in one spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. **21** In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.

Passage Outline

Brought Near
(Eph. 2:11-13)

Peace Declared
(Eph. 2:14-18)

Citizenship Granted
(Eph. 2:19-22)

Keywords

- A. Those who aren’t ethnic Jews. Christ desired that the gospel go to “all nations” (Matt. 28:18-20).
- B. A term to describe Jewish peoples (Gen. 17)
- C. One was officially recognized as part of a nation. Gentiles weren’t part of God’s people.
- D. The covenants God made with His people: Abrahamic (Gen. 12), with Israel (Ex. 19–34), and with David (2 Sam. 7)
- E. Jesus’ death on the cross is what made humankind’s reconciliation and redemption possible.
- F. In Christ, Gentiles and Jews are now one body, the church.
- G. “There’s no need for rituals or priests. If you’re in Jesus, you have access to God through the Holy Spirit

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul made application to the race relations of his day through the words *so then*. Great animosity existed between Jews and Gentiles. Before Paul issued a call for reconciliation, he reminded his readers of their pre-conversion condition and how Christ had brought them back to the Father. To Paul, the only hope for reconciliation was in Christ, who could bring everything together in Himself.

How does a lack of intimacy with God fuel division and prejudice among people? How are divisions an indicator of our need for a Savior?

Paul explained to the Ephesians that they were *now in Christ Jesus*. This key phrase denoted their union with Him, whereas previously they were dominated by their sinful nature. They had been *brought near* through Christ's death on the cross for their sins. Being *brought near* to God forms the basis for reconciliation between believers.

As a believer in Christ, what actions might one take to begin to break down the walls between believers today?

Jesus is the *peace* that removes former hostilities between believers with different backgrounds. Paul explained that by His death on the cross, Christ brought peace between believers. The result of this was a new community of both Jews and Gentiles, centered in Christ. While there is racial unity in Christ, we can't overlook a different and tragic type of unity that exists. Every race and ethnicity shares a common sinfulness and alienation from God.

How does the news of this past week demonstrate that we all have a common sinfulness? How does a common sinfulness lead to division while a common faith in Christ lead to unity?

BIBLE SKILL: Review potentially related passages. – Compare Ephesians 2:20 with Isaiah 28:16, which makes reference to the cornerstone as the foundation on which everything else is built. Read also Psalm 118:22. How does Jesus fulfill these Old Testament Scriptures? A cornerstone bears the weight of a building and serves as the standard for orientating the rest of the building. How does the metaphor fit for Jesus?

Paul explained to the Gentile believers in Ephesus that they were now numbered among the people of God. This is more than mere citizenship; it is participation in the same family. Each person who believes belongs. Believers have been put together in God's family and made into one body through Christ's cross.

How does a shared citizenship in God's family impact how believers view one another?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Because salvation is offered to all people and all believers are made one in Christ, we must work to break down walls of prejudice.
- Only through faith in Christ can we have genuine peace.
- All believers are included in God's family, having a place in His kingdom.

What could your group do to promote unity and reconciliation between believers in your community or city?

Examine your life for things you depend on for peace other than faith in Christ. Thank God for giving you peace and commit afresh to trust in Him more completely.

Do you know someone who needs to know he or she has a place in God's household as a result of faith in Jesus? How can you help this believer find his or her place and be welcomed? Identify someone who appears to be an outsider from your social circle and invite that person to be a part of one of your gatherings.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Lack of intimacy with God fuels division.

Read Ephesians 2:11-12, considering the divisiveness of the situation.

Calling the Ephesians back to that time prior to their conversion, Paul highlighted their pre-conversion condition. First, they *were without Christ*. Since all of God's blessings are found in union with Him (Eph. 1:3), there is nothing worse than being separated from Christ. Beyond that, they were also without community, *excluded from the citizenship of Israel*, and not having an identity grounded in God. Notice their exclusion from the divine *covenants*. Old Testament covenants initiated by God brought a particular type of relationship to the recipients. Without Christ, we are excluded from any relationship with God.

It goes without saying that apart from Christ, a person is *without hope*. Although God had a plan to include the Gentiles in His redemptive work, they were not aware of that and thus deprived of hope, a future focus that someday God would provide a Savior. Paul reminded the Ephesians, as a summary statement, they were *without God*. Lost in their idolatry, devoid of the light of divine revelation, they were bereft of goodness and truth.

How have you seen a lack of intimacy with God fuel division and prejudice? How are divisions in your life an indicator of your need for a Savior?

Day 2: God forms the basis for reconciliation.

Read Ephesians 2:13, underlining the phrase brought near.

While spiritual in nature, the nearness Paul portrayed in Christ was not merely metaphorical. Historical and archaeological evidence testifies to the fact that non-Jewish people were forbidden to enter the main portions of the Jewish temple and threatened with death if they did not comply. Perhaps the Ephesians would have nodded their heads in agreement with Paul's words. One of their own, a man named Trophimus, was involved in a volatile incident where a mob thought that he had trespassed and violated the temple. This incident brought Paul into jeopardy and actually threatened his own life. (See Acts 21:27-31.)

Being *brought near* to God forms the basis for reconciliation between believers. Christ's purpose of unity cannot be fulfilled through mere social activism; it is a direct application of the gospel. Oneness in Christ—a key component of the gospel message—is a defined reality. God calls believers to work toward what is already true in heaven.

What actions can you take to begin to break down the walls of prejudice in our world today?

Day 3: Christian unity is realized through Christ alone.

Read Ephesians 2:14-16, identifying Jesus' intentions for reconciliation.

Christian unity is based on what Christ has already done, not what we have done or what we might do in the future. The cross has broken down all barriers between believers. If walls still exist—and the evidence says they do—it is because humans have rebuilt and maintained them. In His death on the cross, Christ satisfied the requirements of the law of God through His sinless obedience. This sacrifice was intended for all people who believe in Him. The greater purpose of reconciliation is spiritual in nature. Christ's goal was to unite all believers to God, and this would become the basis for unity in *one body*, His church. The means by which He did this was *through the cross*. Jesus' death as the once-for-all sacrifice for sin dealt a lethal blow to all disharmony. Once sin has been dealt with, peace should be the result. One of the tenets of secularism today is that in order for all peoples to come together, religious faith must either end or at least blend with all other belief systems. The gospel refutes that assertion. The only unity that will ever be realized will be the one that is grounded in Christ alone.

How does Jesus' reconciliation create unity? How do you see this at work in your life?

Day 4: Because of Christ, every believer has access to God.

Read Ephesians 2:17-18, underlining the phrase through Him.

While there is racial unity in Christ, we can't overlook a different and tragic type of unity that exists. Every race and ethnicity shares a common sinfulness and alienation from God. This is why Paul explained that the gospel of peace was proclaimed both to Jews and to Gentiles. All people equally need reconciliation with God. Everyone who comes to the cross by faith has the same basic sin problem. The death of Jesus was the sacrifice for the sin found in all, regardless of their racial and ethnic heritage.

Thankfully, through Jesus, the dividing wall that separated us from God and from one another has been torn down. Access to God the Father is given to all who believe. Paul used a word for access that denoted a person in a royal court who escorted a visitor into the king's presence. Because of Christ, every believer can come into the presence of a holy God.

How have you seen a common sinfulness lead to division while a common faith in Christ led to unity?

Day 5: God's family rests on a spiritual foundation.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22, noting the references to being built.

Just as families live in some kind of physical structure, the structure of God's family rests on a spiritual *foundation*. A house is only as enduring as its foundation. It is the part of a structure that is never remodeled and ideally never changes. The status of the Gentile Ephesians would not be altered because Christ would never change His attitude of love toward them. The truth declared by the *apostles and prophets* guarantees that no one who comes to Christ in faith will be turned away. This is the foundation upon which the church rests—Christ and God's eternal purpose.

KEY DOCTRINE: The Church – The church is the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation (Rev. 7:9-10).

How does a shared citizenship in God's family impact how you view other believers?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Ephesians 2, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How do Paul's words speak to a Christian's responsibility about society's lack of peace?

How does Jesus' reconciliation create unity?

What's the only lasting solution to society's lack of peace? How can we live in the reality of Jesus' reconciling work?



For additional context, read "Foreigners and Strangers in Roman Culture" and "InSites: The Temple and the Church at Ephesus" in the Fall 2019 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.