



# THE COMMUNITY

## Brought Near | PEACE IN RELATIONSHIPS

### What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Ephesians 2:11-22

Paul spends the first half of Ephesians (chapters 1-3), simply telling us what God has done for us in Christ. He teaches us how to live in light of those blessings in the second half of the letter (chapter 4-6). The passage we are looking at today falls into the first section.

Paul starts this letter by describing the spiritual blessings that God grants believers (1:3-14), then he prays for believers that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know God accurately and intimately (1:15-23). Next he gives a vivid picture of salvation from death to life through Christ (2:1-10). In the passage we will look at today, Paul describes how that salvation affects our relationships.

It may be helpful to have a little background about the existing racial tensions that give context to Paul's comments. In Genesis 12:1-3, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, which was fulfilled in Israel. He further stated that all of the nations (the Gentiles) would be blessed through Israel. Other recurrences of this message appear throughout the Old Testament.

Over time, however, the Jews became more nationalistic and began to despise the Gentiles for their godlessness. They refused to be a vehicle of blessing to the nations; they wanted the Messiah to return, vindicate Israel, and bring judgment on the Gentile nations. As a matter of fact, when Paul wrote this passage there was a sign in the courtyard of the Jerusalem temple threatening death for any Gentiles who dared enter.

If a Gentile wanted to worship the true God he had to first convert to Judaism and become a proselyte Jew. Paul is referring to the Gentiles' status as outsiders to the blessings of God in v. 11 and following. Note the five specific exclusions Paul mentions in v. 12. The Gentiles were:

- Separate from Christ.
- Excluded from citizenship in Israel.
- Foreigners to the covenants of the promise.
- Without hope.
- Without God.

### What's the Big Idea?

Jesus Christ has reconciled Jews and Gentiles alike to God. In so doing He has destroyed the basis for hostility that exists between people as well. Because of Christ's death we can enjoy peace with God and with our enemies.

### What's the Problem?

The problem that Paul was addressing was the animosity that existed between Jews and Gentiles that spilled over into the Church. God has created a new reality (the Church) which transcends all racial and ethnic barriers. Unfortunately, our relationships as Christians do not always reflect the "peace" that Christ has brought. On the contrary, they are sometimes filled with strife.

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Can you imagine? They were cut off from every good thing that they needed most in all the world. So were we. So are many of your classmates.

But notice how everything changes in v. 13. Everything before that verse describes the Gentiles' hopelessness and distance from God and His promises. In v.13 every one of those exclusions is upended. That massive swing happens because of the blood of Jesus. He is the hero who steps into that disaster and ends peoples' estrangement from God. Now even the despised Gentiles have direct access to God through Christ. For many of the Jews this took a little getting used to.

The Gentiles aren't just saved, and then told to stay in their dirty little Gentile holes. They are included as full members and recipients, together with all the Jews who embraced Christ, of those promises. As Paul put it "the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility [between Jews and Gentiles] has been destroyed."

That's Paul's real point here. He has been talking about the good news of the gospel through out this letter. In this passage he is not merely reviewing it again, he's applying the principals of reconciliation with God to our human relationships.

The gospel erased all racial distinctions and allowed anyone who trusted Christ, even Gentiles, to be reconciled to God and to other believers, regardless of their backgrounds or differences. Today that same gospel cuts through ethnic and cultural distinctions and reconciles people to God. It also allows them, as in Ephesus, to experience reconciliation with each other.

Most people don't realize that the gospel is a deep, rich resource for all our relationships in life. You want to help your bible study see the implications our reconciliation to God has on all of our relationships. Help them to consider whether there are groups or individuals whom they despise. Challenge them to consider what Jesus' love and death for those people suggests about their own attitude. Call them to let the gospel change their hearts.

## What's Our Response?

You want to help your group reflect on the peace that God extended to them so that they will pursue peace in all their relationships.

Ask them to identify specific relationships in which they need to extend forgiveness and grace.

# Ephesians 2:11-22

## The Questions

Q: As you read through this passage, what jumps out as significant to you?

A: *Allow the group to discuss. Keep an open ear to what they saw in the passage. This could be a good time to describe the background of the whole circumcision vs uncircumcision thing (see provided commentary).*

Q: This section starts with “Therefore.” A good practice when reading the Bible is that when you come across this word, you stop and ask yourself, “What is the ‘therefore’ there for?” Can someone remind us what we talked about last week that set up this “therefore.”

A: *Last week’s study of vv 1-10 focused on God’s grace and how His grace saves us from spiritual death to spiritual life and sustains us as Christians – we are constantly reliant upon this unmerited favor. It is helpful to keep this in mind as we read the following text as it is the backdrop Paul set up for what he discusses in vv 11-22. In light of God’s grace lavished on us in love when we didn’t deserve it, therefore \_\_\_\_.*

Q: How does Paul describe the Ephesians’ life prior to Christ?

A: *Separate from Christ; Excluded from citizenship in Israel; Foreigners to the covenants of the promise; Without hope; Without God.*

Q: There was great tension between Jews and Gentiles when Paul wrote this. In fact, at that time there was a sign in the courtyard of the Jerusalem temple threatening death for any Gentiles who dared enter. What are some ways that Christ brought peace? (vv 14-18)

A: *Basically, Christ leveled the playing field. He reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God by His sacrifice in our place on the cross. And he gave us equal standing before God.*

Q: Compare the description of our life after being saved by grace (vv 19-22) to before (vv 12). What brought about the switch?

A: *We went from being excluded and strangers to being fellow citizens and family members. Jesus brought about the switch by His work on the cross – it was nothing we did to earn it (vv 13).*

Q: There are many different members of God’s family – with different personalities, appearances, and quirks. What would a church look like that was truly living out the vision of this passage?

A: *Allow the group to discuss. From the passage we learn that through Christ’s work on the cross, despite our differences we can have peace, unity, and fellowship.*

Q: Think of someone in your own life who you are at odds with, as the Jews were with the Gentiles. How might this passage speak into that situation?

A: *Allow the group to discuss. Because God has reconciled us to himself (when we really didn't deserve it), we can be free of resentment and bitterness towards this person (or people) by leaning on the Holy Spirit to give us a Christ-like attitude toward them. In some situations, other people may not be willing to reconcile with us, but we can attempt reconciling with them and regardless can reconcile with them in our own hearts. ["If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:18 ESV)] It might be difficult, but remembering the grace God lavished on us while we were his enemy (Romans 5:8,10) helps put our situation in perspective.*

**Memory Verse**

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:13 ESV)*