

Ephesians 2:11-22

Week 4 - One in Christ: God's Global Plan For Unity

Learning Objectives

- To remember our story of moving from separation to citizenship - before and after knowing Christ
- To be inspired by Jesus as our peace to pursue peace in the world
- To be encouraged by our membership in God's family

Pray for your time together in God's Word!

Ephesians 2:11-22 (NIV)

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)— ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

? What does this passage say in v.11-13 about the condition of the Gentiles prior to Christ? What did they lack (and what did that mean for them)?

Possible Answers: They were the "uncircumcised"; separate from Christ; excluded from citizenship in Israel; no access to the covenants. The Gentiles had nothing to give them hope; the Gentiles were spiritually lost.

? Why do you think Paul is reminding the Gentiles of their story prior to Christ?

Possible Answers: In order to bring them to a state of humility and gratitude toward God for the new life he has given them through Jesus. To give recognition to God for providing the gift of Christ.

"Gentiles" referred to anyone who was non-Jewish. Circumcision set apart the Jews from Gentiles; in the Old Testament, God commanded circumcision of the Israelites as one way to distinguish them from the rest of the world to be His people. See Genesis 17.

? How does this passage remind you of your story, before and after being in relationship with Jesus Christ?

Possible Answer: Answers will vary.

Read Ephesians 2:14-18 (NIV) again.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

? What are words, phrases or ideas that come to mind when you hear the word peace?

Possible Answers: Harmony, absence of arguments/fights, watching a sunrise on a lake, quietness, a treaty made at the end of a war, a warm greeting

After having some initial conversation around "peace", watch the Bible Project's four-minute video on "Peace". Search "Peace Bible Project" and it should be one of the first videos.

? What stood out to you from the video? How does the video add to our understanding of what peace is?

Possible Answers: Answers may vary on what stood out. There is more to the biblical meaning of the word peace than simply the absence of conflict. It means "complete" or "whole." Refers to something complex that is in a state of completeness. Restoration to wholeness. The Greek word for peace is Eirene (air-rain-a).

? What does this passage say that Jesus did to create peace, and what was the purpose of doing so?

Possible Answers: He made the two groups (Gentiles and Jews) one and destroyed the barrier. The purpose of doing this was to create one new humanity (wholeness) and to reconcile both groups to God through the cross (completeness).

Leaders' Note: "Setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations" is here referring to how things within the law that formed Jewish identity (covenants, circumcision, etc.) excluded Gentiles from being a part of God's people (see v.12-13).

? By pursuing peace, we can be like Jesus. What are some practical ways we can pursue peace (restoration to wholeness) in our lives?

Possible Answer: Answers may vary. Some examples could be to intentionally restore relationships in our lives, whether with a coworker, friend, family member--wife/husband, child, parent, person you don't like in small group, etc. Another example could be to make your home hospitable to non-believers and believers alike. One more additional example could be to examine our hearts towards people from different parts of the world or from different backgrounds to see where we fall short of a loving attitude.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22 again.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

? What results from Christ's peace can be drawn out from verses 19-22? Is there a particular result described in the passage that stands out to you? If so, which one and why?

Leaders' note: Another way of saying "Consequently..." is to say, "As a result...".

Possible Answers: An immediate result we see in verses 19-22 is a privileged sense of belonging to God's people. We move from being foreigners and strangers to citizens and members. As a part of God's people, we have a sure and secure foundation in Christ. We are a family!

? According to this passage, how does God go steps beyond including more people into his family? How does this offer encouragement to us as individuals and as a small group?

Possible Answers: He's committed to making us into a united "holy temple" and "dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit". This is encouraging because God doesn't just unify us together for no reason, but rather with the purpose of making us a holy people where he dwells by his Spirit. Someone may be personally encouraged that God faithfully maintains his intention to grow his people into His image.

? How might God's commitment to his people encourage us to commit to one another as a small group?

Possible Answers: Since we see that God is committed to building us into his holy temple, we might be much more willing to extend patience and grace to others in our church or small group. We can be encouraged to pray with someone through a sin struggle they are facing or challenge in life. Since God has committed to dwell and live with us, we might take steps of grace to live with and love one another when it's hard.

For Discussion and Accountability

? What prevents you from pursuing peace (restoration to wholeness) in your life?

? What challenges make it hard for you to feel as though you belong in God's family?