



Jews and Gentiles Reconciled: One in Christ

DAY 1

Read the Ephesians 2:11-22 3 times.

“Therefore remember” refers to verses 1-10 that describe the state of those without Christ.

1. In verse 11, who are the two types of people referred to here?

The Gentiles and the Circumcision

What are the Gentiles called?

Uncircumcised

Who do they represent?

Gentiles and Jews

The ritual of circumcision was established by God with Abraham and is described in Genesis 17. It was intended as a symbol of the covenant between God and Abraham's descendants and all members of his household. These individuals were then distinguished as members of God's household. Gentiles, i.e. non-Jews, were uncircumcised; as such they were excluded from citizenship, considered to be foreigners, without God, separate from the anticipated Messiah and without hope. Pious Jews considered all non-Jew (Gentiles) ceremonially unclean. They thought of themselves as pure and clean because of their national heritage and religious ceremonies.

2. Circumcision was done to all Jewish male babies – a physical mark of distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Jewish people took pride in this that they were God's chosen people. Can you see how this could be a source of spiritual pride? Write out your thoughts. What do we use today that could be or are used as spiritual pride?

Some things could be denominations, never missed a day at church, way one was baptized, “we don't do that” etc.

3. From verse 12, list 5 things that were true of the Gentiles before they trusted in Christ.

They were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, and without God in the world.

FOR REFLECTION: Have you ever felt separate, excluded, hopeless? No one who believes in Christ is alienated from Christ's love or his church. By the end of this week you will see how this is true.

In class consider asking whether any of them have experienced being excluded or hopeless. Teenagers are especially vulnerable to these experiences since they are so dependent on peer group approval. Being overweight, dressing differently, having an unusual accent, or being of a different color can have a major impact.

DAY 2

1. In verse 13 “But now” indicates something is different. What is different for the Gentiles who are in Christ?

They have been brought near – included – to God.

How did Christ do this?

Through His death on the cross – by the blood of Christ.

Jews considered Gentiles beyond God’s saving power and therefore without hope. Gentiles resented Jews claims. These attitudes produced prejudice and hostility.

2. According to verse 14, who is the peace for Jews and Gentiles? (see also verses 15 and 17).

Jesus Christ

What has Jesus done to both groups?

Broken down the dividing wall of hostility, created in Himself one new group out of the two – Christians.

Only Christ can reconcile and unify. “In Christ alone can be found the remedy for religious hatred, for race prejudice, and for class warfare.” Charles R. Erdman

3. The use of the words “barrier” and “dividing wall” in verse 14 describe the total religious isolation the Jews and Gentiles experienced from each other. Can you think of barriers that isolate religious groups from each other in today’s world? Write them here.

Some ideas might include: type of baptism, require membership to that particular denomination to participate in communion, require certain practices, foundational belief of who God is or how to get to God. . . .

The Greek words in verse 14 suggests that the dividing wall describes not a physical barrier, but the spiritual enmity between Jews and Gentiles which separated them. (from The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

Although not specifically mentioned in verses 13 and 14, they allude to our sin which separates us from God. As Christians, because of Christ’s sacrifice, our fellowship with God has been established. So rather than being two separate irreconcilable individuals, we are now one in Christ. However, even within the Christian community, variations in worship, baptism, speaking in tongues, and now marriage have the potential to divide Christians. The Bible, as God’s Holy and inspired Word, is the standard of truth and healing in all barriers.

TO DIG DEEPER: If you have access to a Bible Handbook or Bible Commentary, look up Ephesians 2:11-22 and write down what you learn about the division between Jews and Gentiles in the first century A.D.

They were separated by racial, religious, cultural and social barriers. Non-Jews were forbidden to enter the inner courts of the Temple in Jerusalem, even if they converted to Judaism – on pain of death. If God could bring these two groups together, there was and is no human guilt too great for Him to bridge. . . His death on the cross is the one means of peace with God for all. . . and all who belong to Him have a common bond which is deeper and stronger than any of their former differences” (from Eerdman’s Handbook of the Bible)

DAY 3

In verses 15-16 Paul uses 3 verbs to describe how Christ broke down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles by his death on the cross.

1. In verse 15 – “abolish” or “abolishing” is used. What did Christ abolish?

The law with its commandments and regulations.

(NIV footnote states “Since Matthew 5:17 and Romans 3:3 teach that God’s moral standard expressed in the Old Testament law is not changed by the coming of Christ, what is abolished here is probably the effect of the specific commandments and regulations in separating Jews and Gentiles, whose non-observance of the Jewish law renders them ritually unclean”.)

“The moral law retains it’s obligation over Christians. . . because the obligations of morality are universal and independent of the law of Moses.” Charles R. Erdman

2. In verse 15 – “to create” is used. What did Christ create?

One new man, or body

Why?

To make or establish peace.

3. In verse 16 “to reconcile” is used. Who did Christ reconcile?

Jews and Gentiles

To whom were they reconciled?

God

Through what did he reconcile?

Through the cross.

These verses deal with the resolution of barriers between Jews and Gentiles. Christ’s primary mission was to bring salvation to all mankind regardless of race, creed or traditions. The Apostle Paul explains the miracle of God’s grace in Romans chapter 5. As the group leader, reviewing this chapter should help the discussion on the resolution of barriers.

FOR REFLECTION: So, Christ made a single entity out of the two groups – the united body of believers in Christ, the church. You could say He creates a new race: Christians. Gentiles do not become Jews and Jews do not become Gentiles. Instead believing Jews and Gentiles become Christians. Thus, Christ is the one who makes peace between believers – from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Do I function as one who is reconciled to other believers in Christ, or do I help keep up the barriers? What are some of the barriers that can divide Christians today?

DAY 4

1. To whom did Christ preach peace – see verse 17? What 2 groups do they represent? (Remember the context of who he is reconciling).

To those who were far away (Gentiles) and to those who are near (Jews).

Paul points out that both Jews and Gentiles were unclean and needed to be cleansed by Christ. (NLT)

2. In verse 18 – through Christ both groups have access to who? By whom?

To the Father by one Spirit

As is often seen in Ephesians, the work of the trinity is seen. Here believers have access to God the Father through the Holy Spirit because of Christ’s death on the cross. (from The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

3. In verse 19 – a connecting word – “Consequently” or “So then” or “ Now therefore” – indicates the thoughts in verses 19-22 are based on what Christ has done as described in verses 14-18. So what is now the status of the Gentile believers?

They are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household

According to Greek law and customs, a foreigner or alien was not a citizen – very restricted franchise rights, someone who was tolerated. In Genesis 17 the Bible confirms that God chose the Jews to be His people. If you were a member of God’s household, i.e. family, God was with you. The household in Bible times is what we would call the extended family. God’s son, Jesus, came as the Promised One, to reconcile the separation of Jews and Gentiles. Jesus title, “Emmanuel”, means God with us.

If you are a gardener or have gardeners in your group, they might appreciate the analogy given by the Apostle Paul in romans 11:17k-24. These verses also contain an admonition for Gentile Christians not to feel superior or prideful.

DAY 5

1. In verse 20 what is the foundation upon which God’s household, the church, is built?

The apostles and prophets

What does the word “foundations” mean to you when you hear it? Look up the word in a dictionary.

That on which something is founded, the basis or ground of anything, the natural or prepared ground or base on which some structure rests; the act of founding, setting up, establishing.

The “prophets” here are of the New Testament Era – the word follows “apostles” – the foundation which consists of the apostles and prophets – those gifted by God as such.

2. Who is the chief cornerstone? (verse 20) Using a Bible Dictionary of Study Bible Footnotes, what is a cornerstone?

Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone.

A cornerstone is a foundation with a tested stone at the corner. See Isaiah 28:16. Rabbinical practice of the time understood the term to refer to the Messiah. The Gospels, Peter and Paul use the term this way to validate Christ as the Messiah. (references Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:1-; Luke 20:17; Romans 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:6).

The Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of a building to illustrate Christ’s roles as the cornerstone. Paul is not original in this description. Prophecies in Isaiah 28:16, Jeremiah 51:26 and Zechariah 10:4 describe the coming of Christ as the cornerstone. A dictionary definition is: “A cornerstone unites two masonry walls at an intersection”. It is a foundation stone, a uniting stone. The entire building is line up with it. Appropriately, Christ is the cornerstone uniting Jews and Gentile Christians.

3. In verse 21 Paul states that God's household, the church, is joined together in Christ and is to be a holy temple to the Lord. In verse 22 who is included in this process? What are they becoming?
The Gentile Christians are included. They are becoming a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

In the Old Testament, God's glory was in the temple, which represented His presence with the people. In this Age, God dwells in His new temple – living believers. In this passage of Ephesians it refers to the “corporate” dwelling of the Holy Spirit = the church composed of all believers – Jew and Gentile.

TO DIG DEEPER: Note the use of “one” in verse 14, 15, 16, and 18. Write beside each reference what one is describing.

Vs.14 – both groups into one; vs.15 the two into one new man; vs.16 both in one body; vs. 18 one Spirit.

This passage in Ephesians teaches the unity of all believers in Jesus Christ. Christian unity is a mutual headship – all have the same head. (see Ephesians 1:22-23.). Who is the author of this unity? (see verse 13 and 15)

Christ

What is the price of this unity? (see verses 13, 15 and 16)

Jesus death on the cross

A quote from Dr. Frank Sells: “Jesus purchased our right to unity!”

DAY 6

A church building is often called God's house. In reality, the church is a group of people who Christ lives in and shows Himself through to the world. ;It is to be a community in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. Think on these words: “God's household”, “holy temple”, “dwelling in which God lives”. Now put the words “I am” before each phrase as you read it aloud. Describe how this affects you.

Closing Thought: As Gentile Christians we are ‘grafted’ into God's household. We are orphans without Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9 from last week's lesson is appropriate, “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”