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small group material



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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Labourers

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 judgement 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.





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.

What Are the Questions?

Ephesians 2:11-22

LAUNCH

Can you think of a time in your life when you felt like an outsider? How would you describe that experience?

EXPLORE

Read 2:11-12

1. List everything that Paul tells the Ephesians to remember in verse 12. In your opinion, which of the five phrases seems most severe?
2. How does Paul describe their life prior to Christ? How does that description differ from 2:1-3?
3. Who is “the circumcision” and why are they calling the Gentiles “the uncircumcision”?
4. What time is Paul referring to in verse 12 when he says, “at that time” and what does that tell us?
7. There was great tension between Jews and Gentiles when Paul wrote this. What are some ways, according to verses 14-16, that Christ brought peace?
8. In verse 15 Paul mentioned the Old Testament Law. Read Romans 2:11-12 and 8:1-4. What do you learn about that Law and the work of Christ?
9. Read verse 16-18 again. How did Christ abolish the hostility between Jews and Gentiles?

Read 2:13-18

5. From what were the Ephesians formerly far off and to what have they been brought near?
6. In verse 13 Paul mentions the blood of Christ. Look up Hebrews 9:22, 10:3-4, and 10:10. What do you learn from those passages about the blood of Christ?
10. Compare verse 19 with verse 12. What has happened in these seven verses? What terminology does Paul use?
11. What are some of the images that God uses to describe this new entity encompassing Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians?

APPLY

12. As a member of God’s household, you have lots of brothers and sisters. What would a church (a community of Christians) look like that was truly living out the vision of this passage?
13. Think of a person you are at odds with. How does the gospel free you up from resentment and bitterness?
14. People from hundreds of different cultures comprise the household of God. What are a few things that we all have in common?
15. What are a few implications of this passage for how Christians of different races relate?

What Are the Answers?

Read 2:11-12

1. Allow the group to discuss. Each one is severe.
2. Separate from Christ; excluded from citizenship in Israel; foreigners to the covenants of the promise; without out hope; without God. vv.1-3 focus on our sin. vv. 13 focuses on our separation.
3. The Jews practiced circumcision in obedience to Old Testament Law. The Gentiles generally did not practice circumcision and did not follow God.
4. He's referring to the period before Christ's death and resurrection. Prior to that event, Gentiles had no hope outside of attaching themselves to the nation of Israel.

Read 2:13-18

5. Formerly they were far off from God's people and His promises.
6. Hebrews 9:22: God has always required blood as payment for sin.

Hebrews 10:4: Old Testament sacrifices served as reminders of sin and anticipated the sacrifice of Christ.

Hebrews 10:10: Christ's death is the final and complete payment for sin,

7. See "What Do I Need to Know About This Passage." Christ opened the door for anyone, Jew or Gentile, to be reconciled directly to God.
8. The Old Testament Law brought great blessings to Israel, but it also brought judgment because it exposed their sin. Only Christ has fulfilled the law. Through the cross, Christ paid the debt for all of our transgressions.
9. By reconciling them together, giving them equal standing in Christ.

Read 2:19-22

10. They were excluded and they were strangers. Now they are fellow citizens and members of the household, i.e., family members.
11. Gentiles are not only citizens of God's community. They are even family members. Paul also describes them as stones of a temple in which God lives.
- 12.-15. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:13