

- **Devotional Reading:** Ephesians 3:14-21
- **Background Scripture:** Ephesians 2-3

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Explain the spiritual dimension of the separation that existed between Jew and Gentile before Christ came.
2. Compare and contrast the separation between Jew and Gentile in Paul's day with the separation that exists between Christians and non-Christians.
3. Suggest an evangelistic campaign that focuses more on uniting people with Christ than on music, programs, and , or social benefits.

One In JesusChrist

Text: Eph. 2:11-22

INTRODUCTION:

A. The Divided Church

- Jesus, Himself, prayed for the day when “all of them may be one” (John 17:21). We still fall far short of His prayer today. There are thousands of denominations today. There are even tensions within individual congregations, even among Churches of Christ. We divide over worship styles, leadership loyalties, and non-essentials. It seems to me that some are determined to create and perpetuate division.
- In Paul's day there as was tension, if not outright division within the church between those of a Jewish background and those of a Gentile background. Paul's instructions for overcoming this spirit of division can help us today.
- W. Graham Scroggie writes the following in “Scroggie's Bible Handbook”: *The Church is not Jewish or Gentile, not Catholic or Protestant, not Episcopal or Dissenting; but is the aggregate of all believing men, women and children, throughout the Christian dispensation, a holy, wonderful, glorious thing.*”

LESSON BACKGROUND

- In about AD 51, Paul participated in what is known as “The Jerusalem Conference.” It is described in Acts 15 & Galatians 2. It was convened to resolve a pressing question for the church of that day: *Is it necessary for Gentile men*

to be circumcised in order for them to become Christian believers?"

- The decision of the conference was that circumcision was not to be required of Gentiles. This decision was not accepted by all. In the next dozen or so years some would teach this erroneous doctrine and Paul found the need to revisit the issue.
- I. **Humanity Divided** (Ephesians 2:11-12 *11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— 12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*)
 - A. **By Ritual (v. 11)** Circumcision was an important sign of the covenant for the Jewish people. It was also a source of pride for them. Before Jesus came, it was unthinkable for a Jew to consider an uncircumcised man as part of the people of God.
 - B. **By Boundary (v. 12):** To understand Paul's argument, we should examine the ways in which the contrast between Jews and Gentiles is seen.
 1. First, the fact that Gentiles were *excluded from citizenship in Israel*
 2. which meant that the Gentiles have no part in the *covenants of promise.*
 3. *Without Hope*
 4. *Without God in this world.*
- Peter writes in **2 Pet. 2:9-10** about the past and present position of the Gentiles. *9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*
- Without Christ the Gentiles are cut off from the blessings that God has directed toward and through the Jewish people.

What Do You Think? In what ways does your church bring the hope of Christ to people around the world? How can it do more in this regard?

II. **Humanity United** (Ephesians 2:13-22)

A. By Christ's Peace (v. 13-15)

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,

- John MacArthur write on verse 13 regarding the phrase “*far off*” and “*brought near.*” “*Far off--A common term in rabbinical writings used to describe Gentiles, those who were apart from the true God (cf. Is. 57:19; Acts 2:39). Brought near--Every person who trusts in Christ alone for salvation, Jew or Gentile, is brought into a spiritual union and intimacy with God. This is the reconciliation of 2 Cor. 5:18-21.*”
- The image of *far away*” is that of a people in a distant country. That distance is now negated , for the Gentiles *have been brought near by the blood of Christ*, which refers to His atoning death.

Verse 14, 15a. MacArthur writes further: “*He Himself--Jesus alone is the believer's source of peace. The Middle wall of separation - This alludes to a wall in the Temple that partitioned off the Court of the Gentiles from the area accessible only to Jews.*”

- When Paul says the Christ *is our peace*, he has in mind the Jewish concept of *shalom*. Lev. 26:6-9 uses this word to describe a state of physical and spiritual wellbeing for an individual who is at peace with God and neighbor.
- Jesus is our peace He is the atonement for our sins. He transcends the things that divide Jew and Gentile.
- Christianity is not a religion of rule-keeping, but a way of faith. Jesus said “*If you love Me you well keep My commandments.*”
- By the first century the Jews had made the wall of partition higher by adding tradition. Jesus tore down this wall. Today, God continues to lead His Church to fulfill His goad of a kingdom of every land and nation. May we not rebuild a wall that Jesus tore down.

Verse 15b -- The unity of Christ should overcome the divisive things within and between today's churches. If our focus is on our oneness in Christ other things will face into the background.

B. By God's Spirit (vv 16-18) *16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.*

- **Verse 16.** What does it mean to reconcile? *To reconcile* means to repair a broken relationship. The Greek word means *to completely bring back again to a former state of harmony.*
 1. First, we are reconciled to God through the cross.
 2. Second, this renewed relationship with God makes reconciliation between people possible, for we are shaped into one body in Christ. This is a place where there is no place for enmity.

Verse 17... John MacArthur writes, "*The Gr. Word for 'preached' lit. means 'to bring or announce good news,' and in the NT is almost always used of proclaiming the good news that sinners can be reconciled to God by the salvation which is through Jesus Christ. Afar of and...near That is to Gentiles and Jews alike.*"

- The gospel remains a necessary and welcome message for all people (Isaiah 57:19).

Verse 18... A unifying factor in the church is the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38). Paul says that if one does not have the Holy Spirit, he or she is not a Christian. The Holy Spirit is the timeless, eternal 3rd Person of the Godhead who was present at creation (Gen. 1:2), and is present in the life of Paul as he ministers, and is still active in the church today.

C. As God's Family (v. 19) *19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,*

- Paul now describes unity using terms such as citizenship and family homes. Phil. 3:20 tells us that we are "**citizens of Heaven.**" Citizenship has both privileges and responsibilities.

The following comes from an article I wrote on my blog, <http://larryslines.com>

"For our citizenship is in Heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus," (Phil. 3:20), We thank God that the Holy Spirit inspired (2 Timothy 3:16-17) the writers of the Bible to write in terms that we can understand. Most of us are familiar with the word "**citizenship.**" We understand that we are citizens of the United States of America. We are "**Americans.**" We further understand that this right has many responsibilities and duties as well as privileges. We are to obey the laws of the

land. The Apostle Paul's use of the word "citizenship" in Phil 3:20 has great importance for us in a spiritual way. Since we are "in Christ," and therefore a Christian, we have certain responsibilities and privileges.

D. To be God's Temple (vv 20-22) *20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

- Scroggie writes: "Another wonderful passage is in chapter 2:19-22, where the church is likened to 'an Holy Temple...' builded for an habitation of God."
- We sing the song, "There IS A Habitation."
- The Church of Christ is built on the right Foundation. Jesus is the Head of the Church and He is the Chief Cornerstone. .
- **Verse 20**----The early church recognized and understood "**the cornerstone**" reference of Psalm 118:22 as a prophecy of the Messiah, and understanding that Jesus Himself taught (Matt. 21:42).
- **Verses 21-22** John MacArthur writes about verse 21: "**A holy temple in the Lord- Every new believer is a new stone in Christ's temple, the church, Christ's body of believers (see 1 Pet. 2:5).** He writes about verse 22: "**Dwelling place of God in the Spirit**—The term for dwelling connotes a permanent home. God the Holy Spirit takes up a permanent residence in His earthly sanctuary, the church, the vast spiritual body of the redeemed."
- The new temple of God is a spiritual edifice made up of Christians from all nations. They are the ones reconciled to God.
- Paul lays out in this lesson the marvelous unity that Christians have in Christ and explains why this unity is essential to the mission and purpose of the church. We have unity in a common Savior, Jesus Christ. We have unity in a common gift, the Holy Spirit. This is all a result of the grace and mercy of God and a Savior, the Lord Jesus who "**while we were yet sinner, died for us!**"