



NG Study Guide: Ephesians 2:11-22 :: “In Christ You Are United” [5.5.24]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: Christ came to unite individuals in relationship with God, but He also came to unite His people in relationship with one another. Those who are in Christ demonstrate this by loving God and loving one another.

Subject: Unity for those in Christ

Object: Be unified with Christ and His people

A. Once divided [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.

“Therefore” points us back, and causes the need to properly understand the context. Paul is writing this letter to the believers in Ephesus from prison in Rome. He is encouraging and reminding them that the most significant part of their identity is that they are in Christ. In Ephesians 2:1-20 we see the contrast that Paul points out between the life before Christ [dead in trespasses and sins vs. 1] and the new life in Christ which is only possible because of His mercy and love [4]. Salvation is by grace, through faith, not by works [8-9]. The first 10 verses are primarily focused on the fact that Christ has united us with Himself. Verses 11-22 are primarily focused on the idea that because we are united with Christ, we are also united with one another. This is where we pick up, verses 11-12 point back to the time when Gentiles and Jews did not share in the reconciliation, they were not united.

We see that the Gentiles were referred to by the Jews as “the Uncircumcision,” and the Jews were referred to as “the Circumcision.” Circumcision was directly related to the covenant that God had made with Abraham in Genesis 17. It was a sign of the nation of God’s people that He has set apart. Therefore, it was a point of contention between the Jews and the Gentiles because there was very clear distinction. The covenant of circumcision was established to clearly differentiate the Jews and Gentiles. This covenantal sign was then used as a verbal identifier calling the respective groups “the Uncircumcision” (Gentiles) and “the Circumcision” (Jews). This was a very real distinction, God had made a covenant with the Jews, His chosen people, that He did not make with the Gentiles.

There are 5 distinctions (other than the actual circumcision) that Paul points out between the Jews and Gentiles. **1. Without Christ.** The Gentiles were without Jesus, which seems obvious but Christ means “anointed one.” The Hebrew word for Christ is Messiah. Therefore, Paul is pointing out that the Gentile people had no Messiah, no savior, no redeemer, no rescuer. **2. They are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.** There was a time when they were divided. The term alien is referring to an outsider or a foreigner. The Gentiles were not a part of God’s chosen people. **3. They were strangers from the covenants of promise.** We see God made many different covenants with His chosen people, the Jews: the covenants of Abraham (a preservation of God’s people symbolized through circumcision; Genesis 15), Isaac (God’s people will outnumber the stars; Genesis 26), Jacob (a promise of the land for God’s people; Genesis 28), and David (a kingly lineage; 2 Samuel 7). None of these covenants were made with the Gentile people. **4. Having no hope.** This was Paul’s acknowledgment that they had no *true* hope. They lived comfortably in an affluent society in Ephesus. However, they had no true hope beyond the material hope of this world. **5. Without God in the world.** The Gentiles in Ephesus had many gods, they were home to the temple of Diana, and they actually had a pantheon on gods. But Paul is pointing out here they didn’t have the only true and living God, the God of Israel.

Paul has drawn 5 very important realities of the Gentiles prior to Christ and has pointed out holistically the division that existed between Jews and Gentiles.

B. Now united [13-22]

1. United in Christ [13-18]

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, 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.

Paul himself was a Jewish man and he is showing that these Gentiles have been brought near by the blood of Christ [13]. But he doesn’t just stop with being brought near, he goes even further to say that Christ is our peace and that He has made them both one [14]. This is an incredible image, the one true and living God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the “I am” God of the Israelite people, has now not only brought the Gentiles near but has made us both one in Christ. In Romans 11 Paul clarifies that the Gentiles are grafted in, they do not replace the Jews as God’s chosen people, but because of the blood of Christ, they are reconciled and welcomed into God’s family.

We see the term “peace” used 3 times in verses 14-18, which means that Paul is intentionally making a point. Oftentimes, when think of peace as it relates to a sense of calm or comfort from God, we think of the inner peace that we receive from God. We have peace because we can cast all our cares upon him [1 Peter 5:7]. We know that we should not be anxious because God gives us a peace that passes all understanding [Philippians 4:7]. But this peace is a relationship peace, it’s the absence of conflict, war, hostility, or enmity between two people or people groups.

Christ’s sacrifice on the cross has taken us from previously divided people groups to a united people who have been made one. Christ has broken down the middle wall of separation [13]. Paul is currently in prison in Rome because he was accused of allowing a Gentile into the temple. Now this was not a truthful accusation, but it was his charge. In Jerusalem, Gentiles were not prohibited from worshipping Yahweh, but they were prohibited from worshipping God in the same court as the Jews. There was a separate temple court where the Gentiles were allowed to worship. Now though this is a

reference to a physical barrier it certainly symbolizes the spiritual barrier that was between them. Christ came to “break down the dividing wall of hostility” is a reference to the fact that Jews and Gentiles no longer needed to be divided, but that Christ died to instate peace between the two and to unify them, bringing them together into one.

Christ abolished the enmity which stemmed from the law of commandments contained in ordinances [15]. The Jews were instructed to live in accordance with all 613 commandments given in the Old Testament or Mosaic law. But now in Christ, these ordinances, or regulations, were no longer what demonstrated one’s acceptance before God. But in the new covenant that Christ established through His sacrifice on the cross, we are all able to be reconciled, and neither of us is any longer required to adhere to the standards of the Mosaic law. Therefore, the hostility, the enmity, the dividing wall has been broken down. Christ came and delivered a message of peace, shouldn’t that be our message as well? Why do we divide when Christ came to break down the dividing wall? We have created so many divisions within the church and Christ came as our peace to create unity.

We are unified us in Himself as one new man [15], reconciling both to God in one body [16]. We’ve been brought together as one new man, in one body. One new man [15] or one body [16] does not infer that Christ has removed their differences and created a homogenous people. God did not make all the Gentiles Jewish, and he did not make all the Jews Gentiles. He brought them together in one body, but they maintained their distinctions and diversity. Revelation 7:9 shows that even in heaven we will all worship Jesus, but there are still distinctions: every nation, tribe and tongue. God’s church is designed to be united, but not uniform.

We see this this beautiful overlaying imagery here because we’ve been brought into one body by the sacrifice of one body on the cross [16]. We are then told that Christ put to death the enmity, and how was this done? By His death.

He came and preached peace to your who were afar off (the Gentiles) and to those who were near (the Jews). The ministry of Christ united us together. All those who are *in Christ* have access to the same Father by the same spirit [18]. This indicates a complete unity. Be in Christ, and be unified with those who are also in Christ.

2. United into one household [19-22]

¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 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.

Therefore points to the fact that we have been united in Christ we are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens [19]. We have been brought into the same country or kingdom and hold the same citizenship, which is nice, and there is a sense of unity around that. But Paul takes it much further, we don’t just live in the same country now, but we are members of the same household [19]. This is an indication that those who are in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, have been brought into the family of God, the household of God where He is the Father.

But we haven’t just been unified into one family or one household of God with one another, but with all the saints [19]. This household that we are part of is the church, if you are in Christ you have been grafted into this meta-narrative of God restoring His people to himself. First, we see that this household of God is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets [20]. They have laid the foundation, the prophets and the apostles have done the groundwork for the church to be built on. The prophets we see all through the Old Testament urging people to turn to God and foretelling the coming of the Messiah, and the apostles in the New Testament sharing the truth of the death and resurrection of the promised Messiah. They have built the foundation through their faithfulness.

We then see that Christ is referred to as the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord [20-21]. The cornerstone is the first stone that is set on the foundation and it determines the exact angle and direction of every other stone in the building. Every single stone's orientation is completely dependent on the cornerstone. Therefore, if each person who is in Christ is being fitted together it is all completely based on Christ. Those who are in Christ are growing into a holy temple, being built *together* for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit [22]. This is how the building blocks work. We are united by Christ into His holy dwelling place. You are a brick or a stone in something that is so much bigger than yourself. You are part of the household of God. And this temple that God is building is in direct contrast to the temple of Diana which was built in Ephesus. These believers would have been very familiar as this was an extremely extravagant temple, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. But the temple that God is building with His people, with those who are in Christ is of such greater beauty and is the dwelling place of the Spirit of the living God. We play such a significant role in the big picture of the Church. The unity of those who are in Christ today, will be the building blocks that the future generations of the Church have to build on. Let us be united with Christ and with His people. Let us pursue unity by loving one another.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What are some ways believers can pursue unity within their local church? Within the Church (all believers)?

Q2. Why is unity with diversity important within God's people?

Q3. Why might it be important for non-believers to see unity among believers?

Q4. What impacts you most about the idea that believers are part of the household of God (Section B2)?

“Disciples Who Dig Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. David Guzik's commentary on Eph. 2: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ephesians-2/>
2. How can the Church achieve true unity? <https://www.gotquestions.org/church-unity.html>

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?
2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead: [Invite someone of a different generation or background to your NG.](#)

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

Next week's passage:

Ephesians 3:1-13 :: "In Christ You Are Partakers"