



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: Ephesians 2*

### **Ephesians 2:11-18 (CSB)**

So, then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” which is done in the flesh by human hands. At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

- “Paul depicts how Satan & the evil powers have divided humanity, setting ethnic groups off against each other through animosity & suspicion.”—Tim Gombis

### **I. Two Aspects of God’s Triumph (Eph. 2)**

#### A) Death to life (Eph. 2:1-10)

- “Paul continues the theme of the new creation introduced in v. 10. In previous sections God was the main subject [e.g. “God made us alive” (2:5)], but now the focus falls on Christ [e.g. “Christ has made both (peoples) one” (2:14)]. [ESV]

#### B) Racial reconciliation (Eph. 2:11-22)

- “Eph. 2:11-21...presents another aspect of God’s triumph, an equally important facet of what God has accomplished in the death, resurrection, & ascension of Jesus Christ, though this is often overlooked. An essential component of God’s triumph in Christ involves the uniting of formerly divided ethnic & racial groups in Christ...” – Tim Gombis

## II. Gentiles: Despised & Far Away (Eph. 2:11-12)

### A) Despised by God’s people – “*the uncircumcised*” (an ethnic slur – 1 Sam. 17:26; Judges 14:3)

- “You were Gentiles in the flesh—called ‘the uncircumcised’ by those called ‘the circumcised,’ which is done in the flesh *by human hands*.” (Eph. 2:11)
- “A crucial factor for interpretation here is to recognize that the issue is set up as from a Jewish perspective on Gentile disqualification from grace...Gentiles had hitherto been strangers to [God’s] grace.” [J. Dunn, *Beginning...*, p. 1112]
- “Paul is...speaking from a Jewish perspective, noting how Jews manipulated the sign of their covenantal relationship with God—*circumcision*—& turned it into a racial label, calling Gentiles “*the uncircumcision*”—i.e.,...“*unacceptable*,” “*outsiders*,” “*sinners*,” “*gentile dogs*.” Because of their sinful ethnic pride &...racism, Israel...cut off the nations from the grace of God.” – Tim Gombis
- In the NT the phrase “*made/done by [human] hand(s)*” is overwhelmingly negative. Jesus & Stephen denounce the Jerusalem Temple as ‘made by human hands’ (Mk. 14:58; Acts 7:48). Pagan temples & pagan gods are “made by human hands’ (Acts 17:24; 19:26). “In Ephesians & Colossians...unbelieving Jews are referred to as ‘the circumcised...done...by [human] hands,’ in contrast to ‘God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus’ (Eph. 2:10-11). Conversely, believers have been ‘circumcised in him with a circumcision *not done with hands*...12 when you were buried with him in baptism, [&] raised with him through faith in [God’s] working.’ (Col. 2:11-12)” [G. K. Beale, *Temple & the Church’s Mission*, p. 224]

### B) Far away & not participating in God’s blessings (Eph. 2:12)

- “Eph. 2:12 lists the blessings from which the Gentiles had...been disqualified....*It was the state of whole nations, not only...of the individual*, that Paul’s gospel...addressed.” [James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, p. 1112]
- To be separated from OT Israel was to be separated from Christ, because ‘salvation is from the Jews’ (John 4:22...) commonwealth. *Covenants of promise*. God administered his OT... promises by his oath-bound covenants (Luke 1:72-73), the chief of which were those with Abraham, Moses, and David. The new covenant fulfills all the divine promises (2 Cor. 1:20...). *Without God* Paul believed all Gentiles apart from Christ were unsaved & without God. [ESV]

1. Separated from the Messiah
2. Excluded from the people of Israel
3. Strangers to the covenants of promise
4. Without hope
5. Without God in the world

- “[Israel was] indeed called to be a distinct people, but they were set apart in order to serve the nations of the world. Instead, they turned their status as God’s chosen people into a mark of pride & racial superiority, working against the purposes of God for the world.” –Tim Gombis

### III. Brought Near by the Blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13)

- *Brought near*. To be brought near means to have access to God (Eph. 2:18). *Blood*: Christ's substitutionary death. He died not only for the Jews but for all his 'sheep' (John 10:16), even those who are *far off* (cf. Acts 2:39). [ESV]
- "The key to understanding the passage is...that the writer sees the two hostilities/alienations as interrelated...Gentiles [are] by definition cut off from the grace provided through Israel's God-given covenant(s), are distant from God & in need of reconciliation with God. But that enmity has become entangled and confused with enmity between Jew and Gentile. Both were expressed in the 'dividing wall' symbolizing Gentile exclusion from the presence of God...At the heart of Paul's gospel was the claim that God in Christ had resolved both alienations and that *the one could not be reconciled in isolation from the other.*" [James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, pp. 1112-1113]

### IV. A New Humanity Created in Christ (Eph. 2:14-18)

- "What God was and is up to in Christ is ultimately cosmic in scope, but in the present that *future* cosmic reality is *anticipated* in what Ephesians refers to as a *new humanity*." [Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, p. 299]

A) Christ is our peace ('our' = saved Jews & Gentiles) (Eph. 2:14a)

B) Christ united saved Jews & Gentiles (Eph. 2:14)

- "Paul says that Christ *came specifically to deal with this racially divided situation*, to heal it within himself. In his death, Christ broke down the dividing wall between Jews & Gentiles so that both groups could become one in Christ. This has direct reference to *all racial distinctions & ethnic groups*. *Christ took upon himself all the racial hatred & division in the world, & in his death, he killed it* (v. 15). – Tim Gombis

C) Christ created a new humanity (Eph. 2:15)

- "The passion of Paul's life—the Gentile mission, [was] *not just the salvation of individual Gentiles*. Rather, [Paul] asserts that *by reconciling both Jew & Gentile* to himself, God thereby *created out of the two a new humanity*—the ultimate expression of his redeeming work in Christ." [Gordon D. Fee, Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, p. 348]
- "The gospel is good news for men & women individually, but...the purpose if [it] all [is] *that there should be a Church*... The sending of the Spirit at Pentecost to create the church is one of the *key divine missions*. Something new happens 'in Christ' through Pentecost. [In Eph. 2:12-15] we see...that the whole *purpose of the cross* was not only to reconcile sinners to God, but also to *create a new humanity*. *The church* is...a living demonstration of *what is in Christ*." [K. J. Vanhoozer, D. J. Treier, *Theology & the Mirror of Scripture*, pp. 75-76]
- God's "plan...has begun to unfold in the death of Christ, through which God reconciles people to himself and to one another — as seen...in the church as the new humanity." [Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, p. 595]
- "Communion with...God is...also communion with those who have entrusted themselves in faith to the same God. Hence the same act of *faith places a person in a new relationship both with God & with all others who stand in communion with God*." [Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: Church as the Image of the Trinity*, p. 173]

D) Christ reconciled both groups to God through the cross (Eph. 2:16-17)

- "...So that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. 17 He came & proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away & peace to those who were near." (Eph. 2:16-17)
- "'Peace, peace, to *the far off and to the near*,' says the LORD 'and I will heal him'." (Isaiah 57:19 ESV)
- "Note that 'peace' [Eph. 2:17] is inextricably linked to 'reconciliation' [Eph. 2:16] in...Eph. 2, so that 'peace' is almost synonymous with 'reconciliation'." [G. K. Beale, *NT Biblical Theology: Unfolding of OT in the NT*, p. ]
- Paul "applies the language of Isaiah 57:19 to both Israel (as the 'near') & the Gentiles (the 'far off'), claiming *both were alienated from God* & so needed to be reconciled to him (Eph. 2:16), & to receive his promised messianic 'peace' in and through Christ (Eph. 2:17), in order to have access to him (Eph. 2:18)...Eph 2:14-15...asserts a corresponding... horizontal [reconciliation] between...circumcision & un-circumcision, through the 'creation' of 'one new man' in Christ... *This third entity...is precisely...the beginning of cosmic re-unification.*" [Max Turner, "*Mission & Meaning ...'Unity' in Ephesians*," in A. Billington (ed.) *Mission & Meaning Essays...*, p. 144]
- "The gospel of reconciliation...includes the reconciliation of humanity with God, & the reconciliation of formerly divided racial & ethnic groups. It is one work—a holistic work of reconciliation, so that to be part of the people of God in Christ is to be actively seeking to unify people across social & racial boundary lines that have been manipulated by Satan & human sinfulness to divide up & destroy humanity..." – Tim Gombis
- "For Paul...the people of God do not merely possess the message of the gospel; *the people of God are the message*, embodying & making manifest the gospel of God's reconciling all things under the loving Lordship of Jesus Christ. And to be rightly relating to one another across racial, social, & ethnic lines is the proper embodiment of the gospel." – Tim Gombis

#### E) Differences not eliminated, but transcended 'in Christ' (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11)

- "We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink." (1 Cor. 12:13)
- "There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male & female; since you are all one *in Christ Jesus*." (Gal. 3:28)
- "*In Christ* there is not Greek & Jew, circumcision & uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave & free; but Christ is all and in all." (Col. 3:11)
- "Transcending differences in Christ does not mean *eradicating* differences. Eradicating differences is what happens when we're tempted toward uniformity — i.e., when we 'swamp the salad with dressing.' It happens when we separate from one another into separate locations for separate ideas & ethnicities. One in Christ does not mean that Yak'ov (Jacob) is no longer a Jew & Theodore is no longer a Gentile; one in Christ does not mean that Fortunatus is no longer Roman & wealthy, nor that Publius is no longer a slave & poor. One in Christ does not mean that Paul ceases being male, nor that Junia ceases being female. One in Christ does not mean does not mean that African-Americans have to be white. Getting a new mind and living in the Spirit mean *we transcend our differences while remaining different as we live with one another*. Our difference is not eliminated, for difference is the vitality of our fellowship." [Scot McKnight, *Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together*, p. ]
- "Paul uses 'in Christ' to mark the identity of...members of the new [Jesus] community...In Paul's teaching people...'in Christ' had the same identity that *transcended ethnic, status, economic & gender differences*...[Their] new...identity did not erase the status differences of people, but... people were to relate to each other according to [their common] overarching status...'in Christ.'" [A. Sue Russell, *In the World but Not of the World*, pp. 146-147]
- "The Spirit was the common possession of all Christ's followers & the common identity marker for the new [Jesus] community in which...barriers were eliminated...Only in the Spirit is it

possible to dismantle national, and social barriers, group interests, caste systems & domination of one sex over another...The people of God, the church as the Body of Christ, is a social reality. Paul used several analogies based on their common...identity of being 'in Christ' & being marked by the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the unity & solidarity that *transcended* but did not *eliminate* ethnic, social, economic, & gender *differences*, including Body, sibling [God's family/household] & Temple." [A. Sue Russell, "Gal. 3:28 Beyond Status & Role," in D. L. Matson (ed.) *One in Christ Jesus: Essays*, pp. 10-11]

#### F) The Church joins God's Mission by Displaying Christ's Victory over Racial Divisions

- "[Ephesians is] a narrative...about how God has acted powerfully to call into being a new people—the church—and how that renewed people are to embody the reality of the kingdom of God." [T. Gombis, *Paul: Guide for Perplexed*, p. 37]
- "The church makes known 'the mystery hidden for ages in God...' (Eph. 3:9) not only by proclaiming the gospel but also *by embodying it*. The church is the body of Christ...*making visible* the [end-time] reality of *the new humanity* created by the cross and resurrection (Eph. 2:15)...*It takes a company of the baptized to [display] reconciliation.*" [Kevin J. Vanhoozer, D. J. Treier, *Theology & the Mirror of Scripture*, p. 258]
- "The reconciliation of the world to God, begun at the cross, is being continued in the church, & particularly in the making of peace between Jew & Gentile [Eph. 2:14-18]. The mission of the church is to participate, along with the apostle Paul, & with the Spirit's help, in Christ's ministry of reconciliation. *The mission of the church is to join in the triune mission.*" [Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, p. 72]

#### G) Faith brings us into communion with the Triune God and with other Believers

- "Faith leads human beings into the divine [communion]. One cannot, however, have a self-enclosed communion with the triune God...for *the Christian God is not a private deity*. Communion with this God is...also communion with those others who have entrusted themselves in faith to the same God. Hence the same act of *faith places a person in a new relationship both with God and with all others who stand in communion with God.*" [Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: Church as the Image of the Trinity*, p. 173]

#### H) Christ opened up equal access for all to the Father (Eph. 2:18; Rev. 5:9; 7:9)

- "*Praying with the Grain*" "The direction of prayer's 'grain'...is classically stated in Eph. 2:18: 'Through him [Christ] we both [Jewish- & Gentile-believers] have access in one Spirit to the Father.' Christian prayer...is an approach to God the Father, through God the Son, in the Holy Spirit." [Fred Sanders, *Deep Things of God*, pp. 221-222]