SESSION 4
RECONCILED

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

11 So then, remember that at one time you were ᾑ Gentiles in the flesh — called “the uncircumcised” by those called ᾑ “the circumcised,” which is done in the ᾑ flesh by human hands. 12 At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the ᾑ citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the ᾑ covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the ᾑ blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the ᾑ dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, 15 he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself ᾑ one new man from the two, resulting in peace. 16 He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the ᾑ cross by which he put the hostility to death. 17 He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were ᾑ far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have ᾑ access in one spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and ᾑ members of God’s household, 20 built on the ᾑ foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A Those who aren’t ethnic Jews, or pagans who didn’t worship God. Christ desired that the gospel go to “all nations” (Matt. 28:18-20).
B A term to describe Jewish peoples (Gen. 17)
C “Only their bodies and not their hearts” (NLT)
D One was officially recognized as part of a nation. Gentiles weren’t part of God’s people.
E The covenants God made with His people: Abrahamic (Gen. 12), with Israel (Ex. 19–34), and with David (2 Sam. 7)
F Jesus’ death on the cross is what made humankind’s reconciliation and redemption possible.
G Barriers of “contempt” (TLB) separated the Jews and the Gentiles.
H In Christ, Gentiles and Jews are now one body, the church.
I Our reconciliation came through Jesus’ death on the cross (2 Cor. 5:11-21).
J “To you Gentiles, who were far away from God” (GNT). All—Jews and Gentiles—need the gospel.
K “Come to the Father” (NLT). There’s no need for rituals or priests. If you’re in Jesus, you have access to God through the Holy Spirit.
L “You belong here” (The Message). Paul’s analogy demonstrates the church as a family (1 Tim. 3:15).
M “He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he’s using you, fitting you in brick by brick” (The Message).
1. BROUGHT NEAR (Eph. 2:11-13)
   • Paul reminded his Gentile readers that prior to believing in Christ, they were without hope and separated from God.
   • However, they were brought near to God through Christ.

2. PEACE DECLARED (Eph. 2:14-18)
   • Paul explained that Christ alone brings reconciliation and peace to all people.
   • Through His death on the cross, God reconciled all believers to Himself and one another.

3. CITIZENSHIP GRANTED (Eph. 2:19-22)
   • Paul declared that all who believe in Christ are granted citizenship in God’s family.
   • With Christ as the foundation, believers are being built into a single building (unit) in which God dwells.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
God reconciles us to Himself in Christ, removing barriers of hostility between believers.
   • Because salvation is offered to all people and all believers are made one in Christ, we must work to break down walls of prejudice.
   • Only through faith in Christ can we have genuine peace.
   • All believers are included in God’s family, having a place in His kingdom.
DISCUSSION PLAN

FOCUS ATTENTION
What do we lack most in our world today?
- Around the world, potable water, jobs, a skilled work force, and human rights are in short supply.
- Wars, riots, church splits, divorce, and anxiety are a few symptoms of the world’s severe lack of peace.
- Paul described the condition of individual believers before and after salvation (2:1-10). Then he addressed our corporate condition that is dramatically changed by the peace Jesus brings.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
EPHESIANS 2:11-13
What did Paul remind Gentile believers they lacked before salvation?
- Gentiles lacked respect from, and a relationship with, the Jewish people. “Uncircumcised” was a derisive term.
- Ethnically and morally, Gentiles had none of the Jewish privileges—no expectation of a Messiah, citizenship in God’s kingdom, or covenant with God.
- Gentiles had many gods but no hope, because they had no relationship with the one true God.

What changed everything for the Gentile believers?
- In Ephesians 2:4, we see the hinge of hope: “But now …” (v. 13). The gospel changes everything for all who believe.
- The Gentiles were as far from God as they could get. Christ’s blood brought them near to Him, where they could experience all His covenant blessings.
- Sin alienates. Jesus reconciles.

How do Paul’s words speak to a Christian’s responsibility about society’s lack of peace?
- There is no room for prejudice in God’s kingdom. Salvation is offered to all people. Believers must view each person as valuable enough to warrant the sacrifice of God’s Son.
- Followers of Christ should work to break down walls of prejudice in their own hearts, churches, and communities.
- The only name-calling that should be happening in Christ’s church is “Brother, Sister, Friend.”

EPHESIANS 2:14-18
What two reconciliations did Christ bring about and how did He do so?
- Christ’s reconciling work is vertical and horizontal. All who trust in Jesus can have peace with God, others, and themselves.
- The hostility between Jews and Gentiles was intensely deep. Both viewed the other with contempt.
- Jesus’ death satisfied the righteous standards of the law, eliminating the barrier.
- Everything that causes disunity was destroyed at the cross. Only Jesus can mend hostile relationships and make enemies beloved friends of God and each other.

How does Jesus’ reconciliation create unity?
- Christ created a new, undivided humanity. Jews are no longer Jews, and Gentiles no longer Gentiles. They’re all one in Christ. Union with Christ logically means unity with one another.
- Ephesians 2:17 quotes the ancient prophecy of Isaiah 57:19. Reconciling people to Himself and one another has always been God’s plan.
- This new humanity no longer has to hide from God. Through His Spirit, Christ ushers all believers into God’s gracious, loving presence.

EPHESIANS 2:19-22
How do Paul’s metaphors convey the peace Christ accomplished?
- All believers are citizens of God’s kingdom, where there are no castes or classes. All have equal value, privileges, and responsibilities.
- The church has no orphans. All believers are members of God’s family, where we’re treasured, nurtured, disciplined, encouraged, and sent out into the world with purpose and confidence.
- The church has no outliers. All believers are stones in God’s single building, where He dwells. We each have a specific place, fitted and bonded together perfectly, founded on the gospel, and held in alignment by focusing on Jesus.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
What’s the only lasting solution to society’s lack of peace? How can we live in the reality of Jesus’ reconciling work?
- No matter how many treaties negotiated and laws passed, there is no real, lasting peace apart from Jesus. Jesus is peace. He signed a peace treaty with His blood and proclaims peace to all.
- The only way to have genuine peace with God, others, and ourselves is to place our faith in Christ.
- The church is to reflect the reconciliation Jesus accomplished. We must strive for unity in our diversity and seek to be at peace with all people.
- Personal Challenge: Do you function as one who is reconciled, or do you keep up barriers? How will you be an agent of Christ’s peace at home, church, work, and the world?
PAPER PLATES, ONE WITH DIVIDERS

Call attention to two paper plates, one that has dividers and one that does not. Lead the group in listing the pros and cons of each type of plate. Emphasize that while dividers may need to exist on plates, we need to guard against creating dividers within the church.

Read Ephesians 2:11-22. Call attention to the divided plate. Explain that dividers existed between the Court of Gentiles and Jewish areas of the temple in Jerusalem, symbolizing the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Highlight that the hostility between Jews and Gentiles was intensely deep. Both viewed the other with contempt.

Note that Jesus didn’t demand someone else tear down that wall between the Jews and Gentiles; He destroyed it Himself with His death on the cross. The things that divided people were gone; their differences were erased by their common faith in Christ.

Call attention to the paper plate without dividers. Explain that now Jesus is assembling a people who live in peace with God and one another.

Ask: What dividers might we place in our churches and lives that we need to work with Jesus to remove? How can we build up Christ’s church as a place where people can experience peace with God and others?

Close in prayer that we will identify others in the church by our common faith in Jesus for the sake of unity and for God’s ultimate glory.

RECONCILIATION

A great problem that has faced mankind since the fall has been conflict. From Adam blaming Eve for his sin, to Cain murdering Abel, humanity has been in conflict and needs reconciliation. The work of Jesus is the way God has provided for our reconciliation, both among humanity and most importantly, between humanity and God.

The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary explains reconciliation this way:

Bringing together of two parties that are estranged or in dispute. Jesus Christ is the one who brings together God and man, with salvation as the result of the union. Reconciliation basically means “change” or “exchange.” The idea is of a change of relationship, an exchange of antagonism for goodwill, enmity for friendship. Attitudes are transformed and hostility ceases.¹

Reconciliation, a positive change or relationship, is one of the blessings and outcomes of the gospel.

In the ancient world, reconciliation started through one of two paths. Either a third party would get involved or one of the alienated parties would take the first step.

Jesus urged us to do the latter in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:23-24). Paul portrayed the Christian as a type of third party—calling people to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). As those who have been reconciled, we desire others to experience this blessing and joy as well.

The stark difference though, between our reconciliation with God and the processes of the ancient world, is that God, the offended party, is the one who takes not just the first step, but every step that makes reconciliation possible as He makes the path to peace for us in Christ. For reconciliation to take place, we, the offenders against God, need only to come to Him in faith and repentance. An even further striking difference is that God is the one who uses us to bring others to Him, through the sharing of the gospel. As the church preaches the gospel, we’re agents of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20).