

# Book of Ephesians Bible Study Lesson 7

## Ephesians 2:11-19

### Unity of the Body of Christ, the Church

#### Introduction:

How can we relate to the Christians in Ephesus to how we minister and relate to each other today in the body of Christ? Look at some of these descriptions below to help you identify with a Jew or Gentile.

#### Jewish Life:

- Attended Godly ceremonies

- Was taught the Scriptures from a young age

- Was taught to be set apart and consecrated for God

- Was taught to keep the law and traditions to remind them of God's promises and plans for now and for their future

#### Gentile Life:

- Were in to creating their own gods.

- Raised in a pagan society

- No hope for future restoration of truth and justice

- Alienated from the religious sect

We learned in Ephesians 1:15 that the Christians in Ephesus were faithful to the Lord Jesus and that they had love for all the saints. Even though they exhibited and lived out their faith in Christ with each other, it is so easy to trust what we are comfortable with rather than God's amazing truth. In our own human weakness it is easy to rely on our own discernment to guide us in our relationships in the body of Christ.

Paul so far in his letter has given us amazing truths to what our redemption is in Christ, what we have right now, and what our future holds. In Ephesians 2:1-10 he has proclaimed to them the richness of God's grace and that it has nothing to do with us. The Christians in Ephesus needed to see that there is now no longer any partiality because of Christ, we are free to live out the richness of His grace to each other, all for the praise of God's glory.

This important truth can only be accomplished through Christ's redemptive work in our hearts. We need to understand how we live moment by moment in Christ's redeeming power rather than our own ability. Ian Thomas in the book "If I Perish, I Perish" makes a note worthy statement (page 76):

*'If you are not yet prepared to do as you are told (God's truth), no matter how weak it may make you look, or foolish it may seem to other people, then whatever you may believe about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*

*Christ, it is still purely **academic**---you have not yet entered into the good of it. The life of Jesus Christ within you makes human circumstances irrelevant when it comes to the point of obedience to His clear instructions; for to share His life now as He once shared His Father's life on earth then, is to know as He did that Someone else is taking care of the consequences.'*

Just as the Church in Ephesus relied on their own wisdom and abilities to build the Body of Christ, so we are also. How can we daily look at our brothers and sisters in Christ through rose colored lenses of Christ and His abundant grace? Isaiah wrote, "I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed us with garments of salvation, He has wrapped us with robes of righteousness . . . (Is. 61:10).

(J. MacArthur) Just as a physical body has a common principle of life flowing through it, so does the Body of Christ, His church. The Spirit of God puts the life of God in the soul of every person who trusts in Jesus Christ and unites that person with every other believer in the same eternal realm. In the kingdom of Jesus Christ all barriers come down. In Him there are no walls, no classes, no castes, no races, no gender, no distinctions of any sort.

This kind of unity Jesus Christ gives to His people and He commands them to maintain it, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph.4:3). "There is one body and one Spirit," Paul goes on to say, "Just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (vs. 4-6).

### **Grace to be Experienced:**

(J. MacArthur) In the first part of Ephesians 2 Paul indicated the importance of our faith built on what Christ has done to give us life and eternal blessing. It is as if Paul is calling us to be so grateful for our deliverance from our old situation that we come to fully appreciate our new situation of union with all other believers. Nothing more inspires gratitude in a saved sinner than a look back to the pit from which we have come.

(R.C. Sprouls) We are not supposed to be motivated to godliness by fear of the consequences of breaking the law, but rather motivated by gratitude. Remember, Jesus said that the one who has been forgiven much, loves much.

In the Old Testament the root concept of apostasy was the idea of forgetting. As long as God's redemption was clear and fresh in the experience of the people, they were zealous in their worship and obedience. But as the memory of God's blessing faded, then their zeal began to fade as well. It is this link between memory and the motivating power of gratitude that produces the fruit of righteousness. Paul is reminding these Gentile converts that they are not to take for granted what God has done in them.

### **Things That Can Divide:**

(R.C. Sprouls) Ephesians 2:11-12 is a reference to the Old Testament ritual of circumcision that involved the cutting of the foreskin of the flesh from the male Jew. It was a theological sign, a sacred rite that was undertaken to seal the covenant God had made with His people. There is a sense in which the circumcised were those who were cut off from the world, set apart, and consecrated to the special relationship of being in the family of God.

Those who were outside the sphere of this covenant of grace that God had made with Abraham and Moses were referred to as 'the uncircumcised'. Remember how David was outraged and horrified that his people would sit there and do nothing in the face of the mockery of Goliath (1 Sam. 17:36). What incensed David was that the challenge to the soldiers of Israel was coming from one who was uncircumcised. For to be uncircumcised was to be outside the sphere of God's redemptive favor.

When Paul refers to those who are without God in the world, he is describing pagan society. That is what we are when we are outside of a covenant relationship with God. Before I became a Christian, I was a pagan. I walked according to the lifestyles and the precepts and point of view of pagan America. We tend to use the softer term 'secular' rather than the term 'pagan' for we usually think of pagan countries as those with no historic conversion to Christianity, which are not part of the Judaeo-Christian culture. But what we have in America and the Western World is a post-Christian society.

In the temple in Israel there were areas that had their specific function. The heart of the temple was the Holy of Holies, where the throne of God was established and where the atonement was made on the Day of Atonement, once a year. The only human being that ever dared to enter the Holy of Holies was the high priest, and only after rigorous cleansing rites that prepared him for this once a year venture into the inside. Outside the Holy of Holies was the Holy Place to which there was access for believers. They could come that far and no further.

The wall of partition does not refer to the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. It is true that, at the moment of the atonement by Christ our Savior on the cross, the curtain which forbade access into the presence of God was removed once and for all. But Paul is referring to another barrier, the one that separated the Jew and the Gentile. The Gentiles could come into the Outer Court and no further, for there was a wall of partition that separated Gentiles from those who were full members in the covenant.

(J. MacArthur) God had originally separated Jew from Gentiles (Isa. 5:1-7; Matt. 21:33) for the purpose of redeeming both groups, not for saving the Jews alone. He placed the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple for the very purpose of winning Gentiles to Himself. It was meant to be a place for Jewish evangelism of Gentiles,

a place for winning proselytes to Judaism and of thereby bringing them “near”. It was that court, however, that the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day used as “a robbers’ den” (Mark 11:17) rather than as a place of witness.

### **Because of Jesus Christ:**

(R.C. Sprouls) Abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations (vs. 15) does not mean that Jesus Christ has destroyed the law of God, but rather He performed in Himself all of the requirements that had to be fulfilled for us to be reconciled to God. The reason why we have been estranged from God is because He is too holy to look upon our iniquity. We have violated God’s law and God has no fellowship with breakers of the law. We were estranged from Him and there was no peace until the great armistice day of Calvary, when Jesus took upon Himself the reality of the wrath of the Father. Christ won for us the rewards which were part of that covenant made with His people. At that point God offered a peace treaty to everyone who would put their trust in Christ. As Paul wrote in Romans 5:1, ‘Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God.’

God’s purpose was to bring together not only God and man, but also Jew and Greek. The first great ecclesiastical council of the Christian community was held in Jerusalem (Acts 15). Peter and Paul were involved and James, the brother of Jesus, was the presiding officer. The central issue at the council was the relationship between Jew and Gentile in the new covenant community. The basic spirit of the council of Jerusalem was to be as inclusive of the Gentile community as it could possibly be.

Now I give that background for this reason: Jesus’ work of abolishing the law with its commandments and regulations could otherwise be open to serious misunderstanding. There is, in every generation, a constant threat to the church from a heresy called Antinomianism. The Antinomian heresy is the view that the law of God revealed in the Old Testament has nothing to do with the New Testament church; that the New Testament church is a church without law, a church that lives and breaths exclusively on the basis of grace.

In Ephesians, Paul’s emphasis is on the fact that salvation is by grace and not by the law. But the great danger that has always occurred when the doctrine of justification by faith alone has been preached, is the danger of thinking, ‘All I have to do is believe in Christ and rely on the grace of God. I can then live any way I want, without any respect to the moral law of God.’

But the New Testament is far from abolishing God’s moral law. Jesus calls his disciples to obedience. He says, ‘If you love me, you will obey what I command’ (John 14:15). So what does Paul mean when he talks about Jesus abolishing or fulfilling the law along with its commandments and regulations?

The sacrifice of bulls on the altar in the Old Testament did not have the power or the efficacy in and of itself to atone for sins. The value of these sacrifices was in a symbolic foreshadowing of the perfect sacrifice that would be offered once and for all by Christ. Of course, once the real sacrifice has been made, it would be an insult to His finished work and to the perfection of His atonement to continue those shadows or symbols. So the New Testament argument is that once the perfect sacrifice is made, then all of the Old Testament practices that looked forward to the perfect sacrifice were finished. It wasn't as if the sacrifice of Christ contradicted the Old Testament regulations in connection with sin offerings and that they were abolished in the sense of the earlier rules being wrong. Jesus never corrects the Old Testament law, he fulfills it. There is a serious difference here between correcting and fulfilling.

When Jesus had debates with the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes, He tried to settle His arguments with them simply by an appeal to the law. Now when Jesus appealed to the Old Testament literature, His favorite phrase was a technical term in the Jewish vocabulary that every Jew understood. The phrase, 'It is written . . .' clearly refers to the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament. It is exactly the same as if He said to them, 'The Bible says . . .'!

Now, just as the phrase, 'It is written' carried a unique meaning to the Jews, so did the phrase 'It was said'. The difference is between written law and spoken law. To the first century Jew, that was the difference between the writings of sacred Scripture and what was called the *Holoka*, the oral tradition of the rabbis. What the rabbinic tradition did was to interpret the writings of sacred Scripture and set down traditions that were then passed on from generation to generation. When Jesus opposes a tradition, He is being sharply critical of those who have substituted the tradition of men for the law of God. Jesus' quarrel was not with the Old Testament, it was with the contemporary traditions of the theologians of His day.

### **Hope in the Churches Unity:**

(J. MacArthur) The church's unity is not organizational but spiritual. Paul's letter focuses on the idea of that spiritual oneness. The terms "Both . . . one", "one new man", "one body", "both", and "together" all indicate the apostles emphasis (Eph. 2:14-22).

Just as sin is the cause of all conflict and division, it is also the enemy of all peace and harmony. Built into wickedness is the impossibility of peace. Sin is basically selfishness, and selfishness is basically divisive and disruptive. We cannot always have what we want without infringing on what someone else wants or needs. We cannot always have our own way without interfering with someone else's way.

Peace comes only when self dies, and the only place self truly dies is at the foot of Calvary. Paul wrote, 'I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.' (Gal. 2:20).

In Jesus Christ, a Jew is no longer distinct from a Gentile as far as religion is concerned. In fact, since A.D. 70, when the Temple was destroyed, true religious Judaism ceased to exist. Not only was the place of sacrifice destroyed, but so were all the genealogical records on which priestly descent was based. Likewise, a Gentile in Christ is no longer distinct as far as his spiritual condition is concerned. His paganism is gone, his unbelief is gone, his hopelessness is gone, and his godlessness is gone.

For those in Christ, the only identity that matters is their identity in Christ. There is no Jewish or Gentile Christianity, black or white Christianity, male or female Christianity, or free or slave Christianity. There is only Christianity. Our one Lord has only one church.

Reconciliation to each other is inseparable from reconciliation to God. As both are brought to God, they are brought to each other. The death of Christ accomplished perfectly what God intended---bringing men to Himself. Verse 13 points to the blood of Christ, verse 15 focuses on the flesh of the dying Savior, and now in verse 16 Paul specifically mentions the place, the cross, where the blood was shed and the flesh was slain. How did the cross accomplish such reconciliation? It put to death the enmity between men and God (Rom. 5:1, 10).

The hostility between men and God was ended in the sacrifice of Christ. He was the One who received the judicial sentence of God for sin. He paid the price of death which God required and thereby satisfied divine justice (2 Cor. 5:20). He became "a curse" for sinners (Gal. 3:13) and provided reconciliation of the believing sinner to God and to all other repentant sinners, regardless of race.

Reconcile is a rich term which holds the idea of turning from hostility to friendship (Col. 1:19-23). Man cannot even reconcile himself to his fellow man, much less to God. Apart from Christ every person is helpless, sinful, and an enemy of God.

The ministry of the apostles and other preachers of the early church was characterized by "preaching peace through Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is characterized by the giving of "Love, joy, peace," and the other spiritual fruit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. God's kingdom itself is characterized by "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). The God of peace calls His people to peace (1 Cor. 14:33; Heb. 13:20; 1 Cor. 7:15).

The resources of the entire Trinity are ours the moment we receive Christ. It is not just a judicial reconciliation but an actual intimate relationship with far reaching, eternal value as we bring our needs to the Father.

**Conclusion:**

(J. MacArthur) We who once were socially and spiritually alienated are in Christ united with God and with each other. Because we have Christ we have both peace and access in one Spirit to the Father. We have an Introducer who presents us at the heavenly throne of God, before whom we can come at any time. We can now come to God as our own Father, knowing that He no longer judges or condemns but only forgives and blesses. Even His discipline is an act of love, given to cleanse and restore us, His precious children, to purity and spiritual richness.

Because we have identified ourselves with His Son by faith, God now sees us and treats us exactly as He sees and treats His Son---with infinite love. Because the Father cannot give anything but His best to the Son, He cannot give anything but His best to those who are in His Son. "Both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father, for which reason He is not ashamed to call us brethren . . . Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are" (Heb. 2:11; 3:6; Rom 8:17).