

The Book of Ephesians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: One New Man: Jew and Gentile in One Body

Ephesians 2:11–22

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal weight of this lesson falls on the unity of the one body that Christ purchased at the cross. Paul teaches that Jesus broke down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, set aside the law of commandments that separated them (the Old Covenant, fulfilled in Christ), and created one new man, one body, one holy temple. The teacher should draw the obvious line to our own day. If Christ died to make one church, then the denominational divisions and party labels that fracture Christianity stand in tension with the very purpose of the cross. This is to be handled not with sectarian pride but with grief and longing for the unity Jesus prayed for in John 17 and Paul pleaded for in 1 Corinthians 1.

Two related doctrines surface here and should be noted clearly. First, the Old Law was fulfilled and set aside in Christ (v. 15; Colossians 2:14), so the wall of separation it created no longer stands; we live under the New Covenant. Second, there is one body, not many competing bodies. The New Testament knows the church, the Lord's church, the body of Christ, not a collection of rival denominations wearing party names. The teacher can speak of the church of Christ in the scriptural sense of Romans 16:16 while avoiding any sectarian or boastful spirit.

Yet this passage is intensely personal as well. We are wall builders by nature, and the same gospel that reconciles Jew and Gentile confronts the smaller walls we maintain by background, status, and preference. The formational aim is to let the cross tear down the dividing walls in each student's own heart, so that the congregation becomes in practice what it already is in Christ: one new humanity, a dwelling place for God.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verses 11 and 12 Paul tells the Gentile believers to remember that they were once separated from Christ, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. What was their condition apart from Christ, and why does Paul begin by telling them to remember it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul tells the Gentiles to remember their former condition, and he lists it without flinching: separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (v. 12). It is a portrait of total exclusion. They stood outside the people of God, outside the promises, outside hope.

The command to remember is pastoral, not cruel. Gratitude grows in the soil of memory. People who forget what they were rescued from tend to take grace for granted and to look down on those still outside. Remembering keeps us humble and thankful.

Note the phrase without hope and without God in the world. Paul names the deepest poverty a human being can know, not material lack but the absence of God and of any sure hope. This is the condition the gospel reverses.

Help the class feel both the bleakness of the diagnosis and the kindness of being told to remember it, so that the but now of verse 13 lands with full force.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The condition of those outside Christ: alienated, hopeless, without God
- Remembrance as the soil of gratitude and humility
- Spiritual poverty as the absence of God and hope
- The danger of forgetting what grace rescued us from

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul tell believers to remember what they once were?
- How does forgetting our former condition lead to ingratitude or pride?
- What is the deepest poverty Paul names in verse 12?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul roots gratitude in remembering what we once were. When you remember your own life before Christ, or apart from Him, what difference does that memory make in how you value what you now have in Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question makes the call to remember personal. Whether a student came to Christ from open rebellion or from a moral but godless life, there was a time of being without God in the world. Recalling it stirs gratitude.

Be sensitive to varied stories. Some have dramatic before-and-after testimonies; others were raised in the church and cannot point to a wild past. Even so, all were once apart from Christ and in need of rescue, and all can remember the difference He has made.

Encourage thankfulness as a deliberate practice. Remembering the pit from which we were lifted guards the heart against entitlement and renews our love for the One who brought us near.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal remembrance of life apart from Christ
- Gratitude as a guard against entitlement
- Honoring varied testimonies of grace
- Renewed love through remembering rescue

Discussion Prompts

- What was your life like before Christ, or apart from Him?
- How does remembering that change the way you value what you now have?
- How might regular remembrance deepen your gratitude?

Question 3

Student Question:

Verse 13 says, but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. How are those who were far from God brought near, and what does it tell us that the means of nearness is the blood of Christ rather than our own effort?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 13 is the great reversal: but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. The distance that no human effort could close has been closed by God, in Christ, through His blood.

Stress the means. Gentiles were not brought near by becoming Jews, by keeping the law, or by any achievement of their own. They were brought near by the blood of Christ. Nearness to God is purchased, not earned, and the price was the cross.

This nearness is positional and real. In Christ, the outsider now stands inside, with full access to God. The wall that kept them in the outer court is gone; they may draw near to the Father Himself.

Connect this to the rest of the passage, where access in one Spirit to the Father (v. 18) spells out the nearness in relational terms. The blood that brought us near also opened the way in.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Nearness to God purchased by the blood of Christ
- The end of distance and exclusion in Christ
- Access to the Father as the fruit of the cross
- Nearness received, not earned

Discussion Prompts

- How are those far from God brought near, according to verse 13?
- Why does it matter that the means is Christ's blood and not our effort?
- What does it mean for you that you now have access to the Father?

Question 4

Student Question:

To be brought near to God is the great privilege of the gospel. Where in your life are you living as though God were still far off, and what would change if you lived in the nearness Christ has purchased for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses nearness into daily reality. Many believers are positionally near to God yet live at an emotional and practical distance, praying rarely, approaching God with fear, assuming He is reluctant or far away.

Help students locate where the felt distance shows up: avoidance of prayer after sin, a sense that God is disappointed, a relationship with Him that feels formal rather than near. The gospel says the wall is down; we may come close.

Encourage one concrete step into nearness, perhaps an unhurried time of honest prayer, approaching God as one truly brought near rather than as a tolerated outsider. The cross has already secured the welcome.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between positional nearness and felt distance
- Approaching God as welcomed, not merely tolerated
- How sin and fear create false distance
- Drawing near as the privilege of the gospel

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you live as though God were still far off?
- What creates a sense of distance between you and God?
- What is one way you could step into the nearness Christ purchased?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verse 14 says Christ himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, and verse 15 says He set aside the law of commandments. What was the wall between Jew and Gentile, and how did Christ remove it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 14 declares that Christ himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility. The wall was the deep division between Jew and Gentile, symbolized by the temple barrier and grounded in the law that set Israel apart.

Verse 15 explains how He removed it: by setting aside in His flesh the law of commandments expressed in ordinances. The Old Covenant, with its ceremonial markers that separated Jew from Gentile, was fulfilled and set aside in Christ (compare Colossians 2:14). The barrier had done its appointed work and was taken out of the way at the cross.

Note carefully that Christ does not merely make peace; He is our peace. Unity among believers is not a program we engineer but a Person we share. Two parties joined to the same Christ are thereby joined to each other.

Be clear, for the church of Christ emphasis, that the setting aside of the Old Law is not lawlessness. We are now under the law of Christ, the New Covenant in His blood (Hebrews 8–10). The wall that fell was the dividing ceremonial barrier, not all moral authority.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ himself as our peace, not merely the maker of peace
- The Old Law fulfilled and set aside in Christ (v. 15; Colossians 2:14)
- Unity grounded in a shared Person, not in human programs
- The New Covenant replacing the Old without lawlessness

Discussion Prompts

- What was the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile?
- How did Christ remove it, according to verses 14 and 15?
- What does it mean that Christ is our peace, not just our peacemaker?

Question 6

Student Question:

Christ makes peace by tearing down walls of hostility. What walls of hostility or suspicion do you still hold against others, and what would it look like to let the peace Christ made reach into those relationships?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the doctrine of peace toward the student's own relationships. Christ tore down hostility; we are prone to maintain it. The walls we keep may be built of old grievances, suspicion, prejudice, or simple coldness.

Invite honest naming. Most of us guard a wall or two: a person we have written off, a group we instinctively distrust, a grudge we nurse. The peace Christ made is meant to reach into exactly these places.

Caution against cheap resolution. Tearing down a wall may require forgiveness, an apology, or the slow work of rebuilt trust. But the direction is clear: those who share the peace of Christ are not to keep private fences of hostility.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal walls of hostility, grudge, and prejudice
- The peace of Christ reaching into our relationships
- Forgiveness and reconciliation as costly but commanded
- Sharing Christ's peace rather than guarding hostility

Discussion Prompts

- What wall of hostility or suspicion do you still hold against someone?
- What would it look like for Christ's peace to reach that relationship?
- What first step might tearing down that wall require?

Question 7

Student Question:

In verses 15 and 16 Paul says Christ created in himself one new man in place of the two, reconciling both to God in one body through the cross. What is this one new man, and what does it mean that reconciliation with one another flows from reconciliation with God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's central image is striking: Christ created in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and reconciled both to God in one body through the cross (vv. 15–16). The result is not Jews and Gentiles politely coexisting but a single new humanity, a new kind of people that did not exist before.

Notice the order. Reconciliation with one another flows from reconciliation with God. The cross reconciles both groups to God in one body, and in being joined to God they are joined to each other. Vertical peace produces horizontal peace.

This is why Christian unity is more than tolerance. We are not merely getting along; we have been made one new person in Christ. The dividing lines that defined us, ethnic, social, cultural, no longer define our deepest identity.

Help the class see that the church is meant to display this new humanity to the world, a community whose unity is inexplicable apart from the cross.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The one new man as a single new humanity in Christ
- Reconciliation with one another flowing from reconciliation with God
- Christian unity as new identity, not mere tolerance
- The church as a visible display of the new humanity

Discussion Prompts

- What does Paul mean by one new man in place of the two?
- Why does peace with one another depend on peace with God?
- How is gospel unity different from mere tolerance?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says the cross makes former enemies into one body. Where is God calling you to cross a dividing line, of background, status, or preference, to embrace someone as a fellow member of Christ's body?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question asks students to act on the one body in concrete terms. The dividing lines Christ abolished have modern counterparts: class, race, age, education, political tribe, personal style. The body of Christ is meant to span them all.

Press for specifics. Is there someone the student instinctively keeps at arm's length because they are different? The call is not merely to feel warmly but to embrace them actively as a fellow member, to welcome, include, and honor.

Note that this often requires initiative and humility, crossing a line we did not draw and would not naturally cross. But this is exactly the reconciling movement of the cross worked out in everyday relationships.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Crossing dividing lines of background, status, and preference
- Active embrace of fellow members, not mere acceptance
- Initiative and humility in pursuing unity
- The cross reproduced in our relationships

Discussion Prompts

- What dividing line is God calling you to cross to embrace a fellow believer?
- Who do you tend to keep at a distance because they are different?

- What would active welcome, not just tolerance, look like there?

Question 9

Student Question:

In verses 14 through 22 Paul describes one body, one new man, access in one Spirit to the Father, fellow citizens, and one holy temple in which God dwells. Given that Christ died to make one body and one church, how should the unity He purchased confront the denominational divisions and party labels that mark so much of Christianity today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson. Paul stacks up images of oneness: one body, one new man, one Spirit through whom both have access to the Father, fellow citizens, members of the household of God, one holy temple in which God dwells (vv. 14–22). The unity is not a suggestion; it is what Christ died to create. To grasp this is to feel the weight of Christian division.

If Christ shed His blood to make one body and one church, then the splintering of Christianity into competing denominations, each wearing a party name and keeping its own boundary, runs against the very purpose of the cross. This is not a small matter. Jesus prayed that His people would be one so that the world would believe (John 17:20–23), and Paul rebuked the Corinthians for saying I follow Paul, I follow Apollos, asking pointedly, is Christ divided (1 Corinthians 1:10–13).

Teach this with grief and longing rather than sectarian pride. The point is not that our group is right and others are wrong, but that party labels and divisions themselves are foreign to the New Testament. Scripture knows the church, the body of Christ, the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16), not a marketplace of rival brands. The plea is to be simply Christians, members of the one body, holding the one faith, submitting to the one Lord, as the next chapter will say with its one Lord, one faith, one baptism (4:4–6).

Help the class apply this honestly and humbly. The unity of the body is grounded in shared submission to Christ and His revealed Word, not in pretending differences do not matter or in organizational mergers. It calls every believer away from a divisive, party spirit and toward the New Testament pattern of one church under one Head.

End with hope, not despair. The unity Christ purchased is real and already accomplished in Him. Our task is to guard it and live it out (4:3), refusing to rebuild the walls He tore down, and praying earnestly for the day when His people more visibly reflect the oneness for which He died.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The one body and one church as the purpose of the cross
- Denominational division and party labels as contrary to the New Testament
- Jesus' prayer for unity (John 17) and Paul's rebuke of division (1 Corinthians 1)
- Being simply Christians, the church of Christ in the scriptural sense (Romans 16:16)
- Unity grounded in submission to Christ and His Word, not mere tolerance or merger
- Guarding unity with humility and grief, not sectarian pride

Discussion Prompts

- If Christ died to make one body, how should we view the divisions among believers?
- What is the difference between honoring the one church and boasting in a party?
- How can we pursue and guard the unity Christ purchased in our own congregation?

Question 10

Student Question:

Verse 22 says we are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific way the Lord is forming you through it, and one dividing wall you sense He is asking you to stop defending and let fall.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone rests on the final image: you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (v. 22). The church is a temple under construction, with Christ as the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets as the foundation, and every believer a living stone fitted into the whole.

Two truths converge here. We are being built (the work is ongoing and God's), and we are built together (no stone stands alone). The Christian life is not a solo project; we are fitted into one another to become a place where God lives.

Press for personal response. Ask each student to name one way this passage is forming them, perhaps a fresh love for the church, a repented prejudice, a new commitment to unity. Transformation, not information, is the goal.

Then ask the harder question: what wall is God asking them to stop defending and let fall? Naming it aloud, and resolving to act, is how the cross does its reconciling work in us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as a temple being built together for God's dwelling
- The communal nature of the Christian life
- Christ the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets the foundation
- Letting personal walls fall as the cross does its work

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that we are built together, not standing alone?
- How is this passage forming you right now?
- What dividing wall is God asking you to stop defending?