

The Book of Ephesians

Lesson 4: One New Man: Jew and Gentile in One Body -- Ephesians 2:11-22

In the temple in Jerusalem there was a wall. It was not large, perhaps chest high, but it carried a warning carved in stone: no foreigner was to pass beyond it on pain of death. A Gentile could come into the outer court and no further. The message was unmistakable. There are people who belong, and there are people who do not, and a wall stands between them. Everyone in the ancient world understood walls like that. Most of us still do.

Paul wants the Gentile believers in Ephesus to remember what it felt like to be on the wrong side of that wall. Remember, he says, that you were once separated from Christ, strangers to the promises, without hope and without God in the world. He is not being cruel; he is setting the stage. You cannot feel the wonder of being brought near until you remember how far away you once were. Outsiders. Foreigners. Shut out.

And then the gospel does something the world has never managed to do with all its treaties and good intentions. But now, Paul says, in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility. The wall did not come down by negotiation. It came down at the cross. Christ took the two, the insider and the outsider, and made them into one new humanity, reconciled to God in a single body.

This is one of the most beautiful and most challenging passages in the letter, because the unity Christ purchased at such cost is something we are forever tempted to undo. We are wall builders by instinct. We sort ourselves by background, by preference, by party, and we carve our own warnings in stone: these belong, those do not. Paul calls us back to the cross, where one Lord made one body and one church, and where every wall we are tempted to rebuild has already been torn down by the blood of Jesus.

Group Discussion: Paul says Christ has torn down the dividing wall and made the two groups into one new humanity. Why do you think believers are so prone to rebuild the very walls Christ tore down, and what would it look like for a congregation to truly live as one body?

Personal Reflection: Is there a dividing wall in your own heart, a person or group you quietly count as outsiders? What would it mean to let the cross tear that wall down in you?

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 17:20–23, Jesus praying that all who believe would be one, as He and the Father are one; 1 Corinthians 1:10–13, Paul's plea that there be no divisions and his question, is Christ divided; Galatians 3:26–28, all who are baptized into Christ are one in Him; Romans 16:16, the churches of Christ greeting one another; Colossians 2:13–14, the record of debt set aside, nailed to the cross.