

## Unit III: Christians and Sacrifice

# Finding Peace in a Conflicted World

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 9:14-24  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:11-22  
PRINT PASSAGE: Ephesians 2:11-22

### KEY VERSES

**In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.** (Ephesians 2:21-22, KJV)

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**In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.** (Ephesians 2:21-22, NIV)

### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Discover points of agreement/disagreement with other Christian believers.
- Accept the value of differing Christian faith practices that may be unfamiliar.
- Dialogue with others from another cultural or religious background about ways to honor and worship God.

### \*Key Terms

**Aliens (verse 12)**—Greek: *xenos* (xen'-os): guests; strangers; strange things; “foreigners” (NIV).

**Circumcision (verse 11)**—Greek: *peritomé* (per-it-om-ay'): a cutting around; a religious ritual done to male babies; a separation from the unclean multitude and true consecration to God.

**Hope (verse 12)**—Greek: *elpis* (el-pece'): expectation of what is sure (certain); trust; confidence.

**New (verse 15)**—Greek: *kainos* (kahee-nos'): fresh; unused; novel; additional.



## The Biblical Context

Ephesus was the capital city of the Roman province in Asia, located in modern-day Turkey. Although the traditional title of this epistle is “To the Ephesians,” some biblical scholars suggest that the writer intended to circulate it among the six other cities in this Asian province, beginning with Ephesus. Paul visited Ephesus three times and planted the Gospel there during a three-year ministry. Nonetheless, whether Paul wrote Ephesians or it was written pseudonymously is contested. This letter is unique among Paul’s other letters in four ways: he does not target a specific doctrinal issue; he identifies the local body of believers within the universal body of Christ; and he includes intercessory prayer and praise. Thematically, Ephesians’ focus is God’s eternal purpose in Christ and how that purpose finds its fulfillment in the church, the body of Christ. Structurally, Paul develops this theme by presenting a theological description of the believer’s spiritual blessings (see chapters 1–3) and explaining how these spiritual blessings look in believers’ daily lives (see chapters 4–6). The immediate context of our Print Passage is chapter 2, where Paul emphasizes the theme of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ in verses 1-10 and believers’ unity and reconciliation in Christ after addressing the former separation between Jewish Christians and Gentiles in verses 11-22.

**Peace (verse 14)—Greek: *eiréné* (i-ray’-nay):** one; quietness; rest; peace of mind; wholeness.

*\*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)*

## Introduction

“One world built on a firm foundation, built on a firm foundation of peace. What a wondrous sight, freedom’s flame alight, in a world where war shall cease. One world, built on love and peace.” These are lyrics to the song “One World” by Geoffrey O’Hara and John W. Bratton. I recall our high school choir singing it during my senior class’ graduation sixty years ago. These lyrics emphasize the themes of peace and unity in the world—a desire that was shattered for some of us who were swept into the Vietnam conflict not long after our high school and college graduations. The desire for world peace among humanity has yet to be fulfilled and appears futile. According to Our World in Data [ourworldindata.org], at least 150 armed conflicts have been recorded annually recently, rarely falling below 100. The Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO) reported 59 armed conflicts globally in 2023, setting a post-World War II record. Broadly speaking, these conflicts result from unresolved religious, governance, and political issues with the underlying catalysts of human rights, social injustice, and cultural and ethnic differences. Most recently, at this writing, the armed conflicts between Russia and Ukraine

and Hamas and Israel top the list for our country’s economic involvement and whose resolutions are far from being realized.

As challenging and disheartening as global armed conflicts are, regrettably, they are and have been realities among God’s people, the church, because of differing cultural and religious backgrounds and resistance to reconciling them. A significant cause of conflict within the early church was Jewish Christians’ refusal to admit and accept non-Jews who desired to follow Christ. After his conversion and commission to share the Gospel with Gentiles, Paul consistently labored to convince those among Christian Jews that it was God’s plan all along

to unite Jews and Gentiles in the church despite their cultural, religious, and ethnic differences. In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul emphasizes that Gentile believers are fully integrated into the faith community.

## ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

### **Alienated from God and His People** (*Ephesians 2:11-12*)

#### **KJV**

**11** Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;  
**12** That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

#### **NIV**

**11** Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—  
**12** remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

“A major aspect of God’s work of grace in redeeming people is to change the us-versus-them attitude into the us-and-them attitude. He works in the redeemed to replace hatred with love, especially within the family of faith. Paul applied this truth to Jewish and Gentile believers in Ephesians 2:11-22” (Lifeway In-depth Bible Study [2006]. Ephesians—God’s Spiritual People, page 64. Nashville, TN: Lifeway Press). The hostility between Jews and Gentiles threatened the early church’s unity. It contradicted God’s plan to include all people in the new community of believers established through Jesus Christ. As one called and commissioned to proclaim the Gospel message to Gentiles, Paul sought to inform Jewish and Gentile Christians that they were now one family of redeemed people. Therefore, in Ephesians 2:11-13, Paul addresses Gentile believers to affirm this truth. He begins by reminding them of what they were in the past without Christ as viewed by the Jews. They were branded the “uncircumcised,” those without the physical mark of God’s covenant with His people, pagans with whom they refused to associate (**verse 11**). Second, Paul reminded his Gentile audience of how spiritually damaged their lives were before being saved (**verse 12**). Paul encouraged these Gentile believers to remember five points about their unsaved condition.

They were to recall that in their past, they were without Christ and excluded from the fellowship and privileges enjoyed by God’s chosen people, Israel. Consequently, they were foreigners to the covenant promise, the promise to the Jews fulfilled in Christ, the Messiah,

without hope for the future and no assurance of eternal life. Finally, Paul called the Gentiles to remember that in their past, they were “without God in the world,” having no knowledge of Him and limited to live lives confined to the world’s uncertainties. The Gentiles’ former state was spiritual bankruptcy, as are all who have not accepted Christ by faith. Paul’s encouragement of the Gentiles to remember their past without Christ should motivate us to reflect on our changed status and position in Him. Remembering the blessings and benefits we enjoy now because we are in Christ should evoke a perpetual attitude of gratitude that informs and directs how and why we worship God. Finally, recalling how accepting Christ transformed our lives and guaranteed eternal security should motivate us to live godly lives, reflect Christ’s character, and witness to others so that they can experience the transformative power of God’s grace.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How should Paul’s description of the Gentiles’ past in Ephesians 2:12 impact our concern for the unsaved?

### In the Family Now (*Ephesians 2:13-18*)

#### KJV

**13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.**

**14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;**

**15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;**

**16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:**

**17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.**

**18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.**

#### NIV

**13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

**14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,**

**15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,**

**16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.**

**17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.**

**18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.**

Paul transitions to what the Gentiles are now in **verse 13**. Whereas they were separated from God because of sin, now they are brought near to Him because of Christ's sacrifice, making the forgiveness of sin possible for all humanity—Jews and Gentiles. Further, Paul explains that not only did His sacrifice give them access to God, but He also became their peace, affirming that His death on the Cross brought Jews and Gentiles together as one and destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility separating them (**verse 14**). Paul alludes to a physical and spiritual wall separating Jews and Gentiles in this passage. Bible scholars have suggested several explanations for this dividing wall. However, there is some agreement that Paul refers to the wall separating the Court of the Gentiles from the courts where only Jews were permitted. However, more significant is the fact that Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice broke down all barriers separating Jews and Gentiles, ensuring that all who accept Him by faith become one body—the church. Paul explained that Christ's death on the Cross freed them from the burden of keeping the ceremonial law and the moral law's condemnation, resulting in a new humanity, a new creation composed of Jews and Gentiles equally and equitably (**verses 15-16**). Paul continues his focus on this new relationship in **verses 17-18**. Here, Paul stresses that Christ's coming meant that peace could be proclaimed to Gentiles (those far off) and Jews (those near), thus allowing them to access peace with God through the Holy Spirit. Paul affirms that Christ's death was how all accepting Him by faith are made one family, one unified community at peace with God through the Holy Spirit's unifying power. Consequently, Christians should strive to live in peace and unity within and across the faith community by intentionally breaking down any barriers of hostility caused by cultural and religious differences and embracing the spirit of reconciliation that Christ secured on the Cross.

## **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**What are some “dividing walls of hostility” separating believers within the faith community?**

## **Fulfilling God's Purpose (*Ephesians 2:19-22*)**

### **KJV**

**19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;**

**20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;**

**21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:**

**22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.**



**19** Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,

**20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

**21** In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

**22** And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Paul explains the consequences of Jews and Gentiles' union in Christ in **verses 19-22**. Contrary to Jewish believers' hostile opinion about them, Gentile believers are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God's people and part of God's household, the new unified humanity—with the rights, privileges, and benefits of kingdom citizens (**verse 19**). To further illustrate this principle, Paul uses a building metaphor. He applies it to God's redeemed people whose foundation is the divinely inspired apostles and prophets who proclaimed the mystery that God intended to include Gentiles in the church with Christ as its cornerstone (**verse 20**). The cornerstone is the first stone set used to construct a foundation. It is the reference point for setting all other stones to ensure that the structure is aligned correctly. Thus, Paul's metaphor for Christ as the church's cornerstone emphasizes that He is the foundation for the apostles' and prophets' teaching. Consequently, without Him, the church would have no firm foundation. As the cornerstone, Christ continuously builds the church by fitting and joining together its parts (believers) to erect a holy sanctuary to become God's dwelling in the Spirit (**verses 20-22**). These closing verses reaffirm that Gentiles, all humanity, are included in God's purpose for the church. This pivotal truth challenges the faith community to recognize its identity as God's temple, "fitted together" by Christ, and its responsibility to intentionally contribute to its spiritual growth and ministries, actively work to eliminate division, and promote unity for God's glory and its perpetual edification.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Supposing Christ is the church's cornerstone, how should that affect the church's interpersonal relationships or how we get along?

## A Closing Thought

Finding peace in a conflicted world—especially within the church, God's temple—involves acknowledging, recognizing, and practicing the principles Paul outlines in Ephesians 2:11-22. Among these principles are embracing our reconciliation in Christ by fostering internal unity despite cultural and religious differences, advocating inclusivity based on

our shared relationship with Christ, and living lives that reflect our identity as members of God's household.

## Your Life

Cultural, religious, and doctrinal differences cause conflict and division within the twenty-first-century faith community. Therefore, apply this lesson's focus by considering how to prepare yourself to engage, minister to, and learn from people who differ from you in these areas without prejudice.

## Your World!

Christ's sacrificial death reconciled Jews and Gentiles, created a "new humanity" (the church), and destroyed the hostility between them. The faith community is now responsible for reconciliation (see 2 Corinthians 5:18-19). An authentic ministry of reconciliation is God-ward and interpersonal and can eliminate the causes of division among believers. Therefore, consider what spiritual biases and prejudices might hamper your congregation from practicing reconciliation internally and in your local community and suggest practical ways to overcome them.

## Closing Prayer

Dear God, give us the spiritual insight to look beyond cultural and religious differences and practices that are causing disagreement and division within Your temple, the church. Then use us as agents of reconciliation to foster peace, unity, and inclusivity as Your representatives in the world now. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Conclusion

### (Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week, we explore how the author of the book of Hebrews instructs believers to model Jesus' way of demonstrating love.

## Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, August 18	"Return to the Lord"	(Joel 2:12-17)
TUESDAY, August 19	"Faith without Works Is Dead"	(James 2:14-26)
WEDNESDAY, August 20	"Everlasting Reign"	(Psalm 146)
THURSDAY, August 21	"A New Song"	(Psalms 149–150)
FRIDAY, August 22	"Teach Us to Pray"	(Luke 11:1-13)
SATURDAY, August 23	"Practice Deeds of Mutual Love"	(Hebrews 13:1-8)
SUNDAY, August 24	"Offer Sacrifices of Praise"	(Hebrews 13:9-21)