



Sunday School Lesson for November 28, 2004.
Released on: November 26, 2004.

Sunday School Lesson "A New Relationship"
Lesson: **Ephesians 2: 11-21**

Devotional Reading: **Ephesians 2: 4-10**

Time: AD 60
Place: from Rome

Golden Text: "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19 NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

The Epistle (or Letter) of Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul while he was in Ephesus. It was not written to a specific church in Asia, but to the church as the body of Christ as a whole. Paul's writing to the Ephesians emphasizes the truth that all believers-whether Jew or Gentile-are united in Christ because the church is the one body of Christ.

Because human beings are the "children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2), we cannot save ourselves. Redemption is, in fact, "the gift of God" (vs. 8) offered by grace and received through faith in Christ. This being so, no one can boast as if he had achieved salvation through his own works (vs. 9). Works, however, have an important role to play, "for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (vs. 10). Works are not the means of salvation, but the result!

LESSON BACKGROUND

Throughout history, the Jews had been God's special people-and they were, but they continually failed to do what God wanted them to do. They were supposed to be a light to the Gentiles-pointing them toward God. Instead, the Jews became prideful and looked down on the Gentiles. They did not show them the way to God. Some Gentiles nevertheless converted to Judaism and were allowed in the Court of the Gentiles, the outermost part of the temple.

It was in this light that Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians, telling them that they were no longer foreigners. Before coming to Christ, they really were foreigners and even enemies of God. The Ephesians, who were predominantly Gentiles, had been totally separated from God. But in God's goodness, He had made them alive... through Jesus Christ.

OUTLINE

Separated from Christ: Eph. 2:11-12

Saved by the Blood of Christ: Eph. 2:13-18

Solid Foundation in Christ: Eph. 2:19-21

EPHESIANS 2:11--21

V.11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who were called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—

V.12 that at that time you 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.

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

V.14 for He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

V.15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,

V.16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

V.17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

V.18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

V.19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

V.20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,

V.21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

QUESTION 1: What does "Gentile" mean, and what is the meaning of "Uncircumcision" and "Circumcision?" Eph. 2:11-12

Because the outward sign of the Abrahamic covenant was circumcision, the Jews proudly referred to themselves as "the Circumcision." Somewhat less kindly, they called Gentiles the "Uncircumcision." "Gentiles" simply means "nations," and in Scripture it is equivalent to "pagan" or "heathen." Calling someone "Uncircumcision" was simply another way of saying "Gentile," and was often used as an expression of contempt (1 Sam. 17:26).

Remember, though, that under the new covenant through Jesus Christ, physical circumcision is irrelevant. What matters is that hearts are changed by the power of the Holy Spirit (Phil. 3:3).

QUESTION 2: In what sense were Gentiles "strangers from the covenants of promise?" Eph. 2:12

Paul painted vividly the bleak condition of pagans, or non-believers. They had no hope, for God had not reached out to them to establish a covenant relationship. Paul was saying that to be outside of Christ was to be separated from: God's plan, God's people, God's promises, God's paradise, and God's presence.

Being in Christ means that we share in some of the promises that were made to Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation.

QUESTION 3: How were the Gentiles brought near to God? Eph. 2:13

Before the Gentiles had accepted Christ as Savior, they were "far off." This was the typical way Jews described Gentiles. But, because God erects no barrier between Himself and Gentiles, no separation exists between Jesus and Gentiles. This means that those who were once "far off" have been brought near to God through the "blood of Christ." This reference is to the crucifixion, which is the great equalizer. At the cross we all stand on equal footing. Whatever one's background, previous sins, or lifestyle, Christ blood is sufficient.

QUESTION 4: What does the "middle wall of partition" (vs. 14) refer to?

This "middle wall of partition" served as separation between Jews and Gentiles, and was vividly portrayed by an actual partition in the temple area-by signs warning that any Gentile going beyond the Court of the Gentiles would receive swift and sudden

death. This was outright discrimination by the Jews towards the Gentiles, but it was an accepted way of life at the time. But, thank God for Jesus that there is no longer this separatism existing within Christ's church.

Even though the Jewish temple was still standing at the time of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the spiritual barrier between Jew and Gentile was actually "broken down" (Eph. 2:14) because of Christ's "once for all" (Heb. 10:10), sacrificial death.

QUESTION 5: What was the "law of commandments" (vs. 15)? Why was it abolished?

The "law of commandments" refers to the Mosaic Law, or the law that was given to Moses by God on top of Mount Sinai-the Ten Commandments. Paul was not saying that God had rejected the righteous standards of the law. Rather, in Christ the righteous standards that people could never reach have been accomplished. Christ is our righteousness; in Him, believers fulfill the law. Matthew 5:17, 20 tells us that Christ's purpose was not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it through His payment of sin for both the Jew and the Gentile. This law was "abolished" or made inoperative by Christ.

QUESTION 6: What is the "one body" (vs. 16)?

The Christian church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, is described as "one new man." In the earliest days of Christianity, the church was largely made up of Jews. But under the direction of God's Spirit, the believers witnessed to Gentiles (Acts 10), who then outnumbered the Jewish members.

Having paid the price for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles, Christ made possible the creation of this "one new man," that is, one body in Christ. Although now made up of many nationalities, Christ's church is but one body. We are one in Christ.

QUESTION 7: Who were those "afar off" and those who were "nigh" (vs. 17)?

Again, "you who were afar off" refers to Gentiles, and "those who were near" refers to Jews.

Do these types of reminders in the Bible (i.e., Gentiles' "far off-ness" versus Jews' "near-ness") perpetuate the modern day separatism of Jews from non-Jews? Perhaps, but it is important to remember that Christ came to eliminate the difference. This is the blessed part-the "good news" (The Gospel).

QUESTION 8: What three figures did Paul use in reference to the church?

Paul said the church was 1) that of a family or "household," 2) "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," and 3) a "holy temple in the Lord."

QUESTION 9: Who were the "apostles and prophets" (vs. 20)? How is Christ the "Cornerstone?"

The "apostles and prophets" were the foundation of the church because they pointed to and witnessed to Jesus. "Apostles" were those specially chosen by Christ to establish the church after his ascension (Luke 6:13-16; I Cor. 15:8-9)-of which there are no more "original" apostles today. And, "prophets" may refer either to the Old Testament prophets who anticipated the coming of the Messiah, or more likely, to New Testament prophets who were active during these formative days of the early church (Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10). The early church was established on the teaching and preaching of apostles and prophets (Acts 2).

In ancient buildings, the "cornerstone" was far more than an ornamental stone that contained the date of construction. Rather, it was the first large stone placed at the corner of a building to which the builders would line up the rest of the structure to (I Pet. 2:1-9). In this regard, Christ is the perfect model for believers to follow (I Pet. 2:21). Christ Himself is the rock foundation on which the whole church rests (I Cor. 3:11).

QUESTION 10: What is your role in building God's "holy temple?" (Eph. 2:21)

Whatever your ministry for God and His church might be, it should be reaching out to those who are lost to eventually join Christ's family of one, and be "fitted together" within the Lord's "holy temple."

"Being fitted together" pictures the process of Roman construction whereby laborers (usually slaves) would turn huge rocks around until they fit each other perfectly. For example, columns appeared to be one piece, but were actually separate cylinders of stone resting on each other. In similar fashion, God fits believers together-through ministries-into the "holy temple" He is building for Himself.

CONCLUSION

Jews and Christians share a common affection for the Old Testament and for other things of mutual value. Most Jews, however, still are "blinded, for until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ" (II Cor. 3:14). [As the veil on the face of Moses reminded Paul in II Corinthians of another veil. As Moses' veil concealed the fading glory of his ministry, so there is a veil on the hearts of people concealing the fading away of the old covenant.]

Christians have the responsibility and opportunity to help remove that obstacle to spiritual enlightenment. See whether there is any Christian mission to Jews that you can support in your area.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Remembering what we were before Christ saved us will help keep us humble (Eph. 2:11-12).
2. Barriers that would be insurmountable elsewhere are broken down in Christ (vss. 13-14).
3. In light of what Christ went through to make us one, we should not allow enmities to fester among believers (vss. 15-16).
4. We must live in peace with one another if we are to honor the One who proclaimed peace to us from God (vss. 17-18).
5. Understanding who we are together in Christ should change the way we relate to one another day by day (vss. 19-21).

PRAYER

Our Father, thank You for Your church that unites Your people in happy fellowship, and earnest work, and cordial love. May we nobly do our part to increase and improve it. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Cherish the unity of the church-and work to maintain it.

LOOKING AHEAD AT NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The next quarter's lessons come from both the Old and New Testaments, and recount how God called various people to believe in and follow Him. Next week's lesson from Genesis 11:27 through 12:9 introduces us to Abram (Abraham)-who provides a wonderful example of faith by following the Lord's call to leave his land, family, and people to go to a land he had never before seen; a land the Lord promised to give him.

December 5, 2004: **"Called to Follow in Faith"**

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Background Scripture and Printed Text: **Genesis 11:27-12:9**

Golden Text: "Now the Lord had said to Abram: Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1 NKJV).

Thank you for your patience concerning the recently delayed lessons!

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