

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Ephesians 2:11-22

In verse 11 we see the only imperative verb (i.e. the only command) Paul gives in the first three chapters. It's the command to "remember"! In verse 12 Paul offers the Gentile believers a brief synopsis of what their lives prior to knowing Jesus was like. Verses 13 and 19 remind the believers of what is theirs "in Christ". (Please keep in mind that "in Christ" is a key to understanding Ephesians...the entire letter pretty much outlines what it means to be "in Christ".)

Q. Describe, in as much detail as you feel comfortable, what your life prior to Jesus was like.

Q. Describe how being "in Christ" has changed your life.

Something we need to be careful of here is that we tend to view our faith from a very individualistic lens. Most of the world—past and present—and most certainly the first readers of this letter, think in a more group/communal sense. (To test this, how did you approach the questions above? Compare that to how Paul was addressing a group of people collectively, as opposed to a collection of individuals.)

An important characteristic to understand about broken/corrupt humanity (i.e. humanity that is separate from Christ) is the propensity to create "us & them" categories...which usually devolve into "us vs. them" thinking and behaving. Humanity, sadly, is highly skilled at this us/them thing, and the movement is always toward US gaining power over THEM. It can begin with something as simple as name-calling, and eventually develop into something like genocide.

Q. List all the different categories of us/them that people function with. Now make it a little more personal: what is some us/them ways that you find yourself thinking sometimes?

The us/them that the early church dealt with—and that predominately flavors the entire New Testament—is the Jew/Gentile tension. The first Christians were Jewish. Yet they were commanded to take the Gospel to the world. This would naturally lead to them confronting their own prejudices...which were deep. Paul described it in this passage as the "dividing wall of hostility" (verse 14).

Here's the beautiful and powerful way Paul described what Jesus purposed and accomplished, *"His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace."* (verse 15). An important understanding of the word "peace" is that it's more than the absence of hostility, but is about repairing something and getting it back to its original intention/design. God never intended humanity to be so broken and divided (we took care of that ourselves), but He is working to repair that...and in Christ He did. Now you might say, "But wait! I see all this

brokenness and division and tension and hostility all over the place. How can you say Jesus made peace?” Great question!

This is why it's so important to always remember that we live in the “Now...and not yet” tension of the ages. Two different ages exist simultaneously and overlapping with one another. And the church has a very unique and important role to play in all this. The church is called to live out the reality of this new humanity. We are a distinct people group in the world. What makes us distinct is our leader...King Jesus. In fact, we can say that as we live out love and unity we become the proof, the evidence, of the truth of the Gospel. (Of course, the opposite is also true...to the degree that we live in division and strife we make the Gospel hard to believe.) Whatever differences we may have between us as humans—language, culture, race, national origin, gender, class, etc.—all take a backseat to what we have in common, our faith/allegiance to King Jesus. He is who we rally around; He is who unifies us. To allow any differences to take precedence over our unity in Him shows that we really don't get it.

Something that is easy for us to miss in this passage that most of the initial readers would have understood is the imagery of the temple (specifically the temple in Jerusalem) that Paul used. Take a look at the image below (next page) and check out the layout of the temple. Notice on the outside is the “Court of the Gentiles”. There were actually signs posted on the wall/fence that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the “Sacred Enclosure” that stated that any Gentile that came inside would be punished by death. This is likely what Paul had in mind by using the term “dividing wall of hostility”. That literal, physical wall symbolized so much of broken humanity. You may recall that in Acts 21 Paul was arrested in Jerusalem because some Jews thought Paul had brought a Gentile into the temple area. The reason Paul was currently in prison writing this letter stems back to that event/misunderstanding/false charge. (Acts 21:27-29)

But notice verse 18, *“For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”* The key word is “access”. The reality is, even Jews (beyond the High Priest) also were denied access to God based on the temple system. God dwelt in the Holy of Holies (or The Most Holy Place) behind a curtain. If anyone besides the High Priest entered (and only if he followed a very detailed plan) would be killed. So while the Jews were closer...they still didn't have access prior to Jesus creating access. (This is why the imagery and significance of the curtain in the temple being torn from top to bottom when Jesus died is so powerful...what previously demonstrated blockage was removed and access was opened. See Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, Luke 23:45.)

So what we really see in this entire passage is to two-fold plan of God. God desires to dwell with humanity, and He desires humanity to dwell peacefully with each other, and to enjoy Him and each other. This is the purpose of the Church...to live out God's plan. Through Jesus (our Great High Priest as the author of Hebrews puts it) we have access to God, and we have peace with each other.

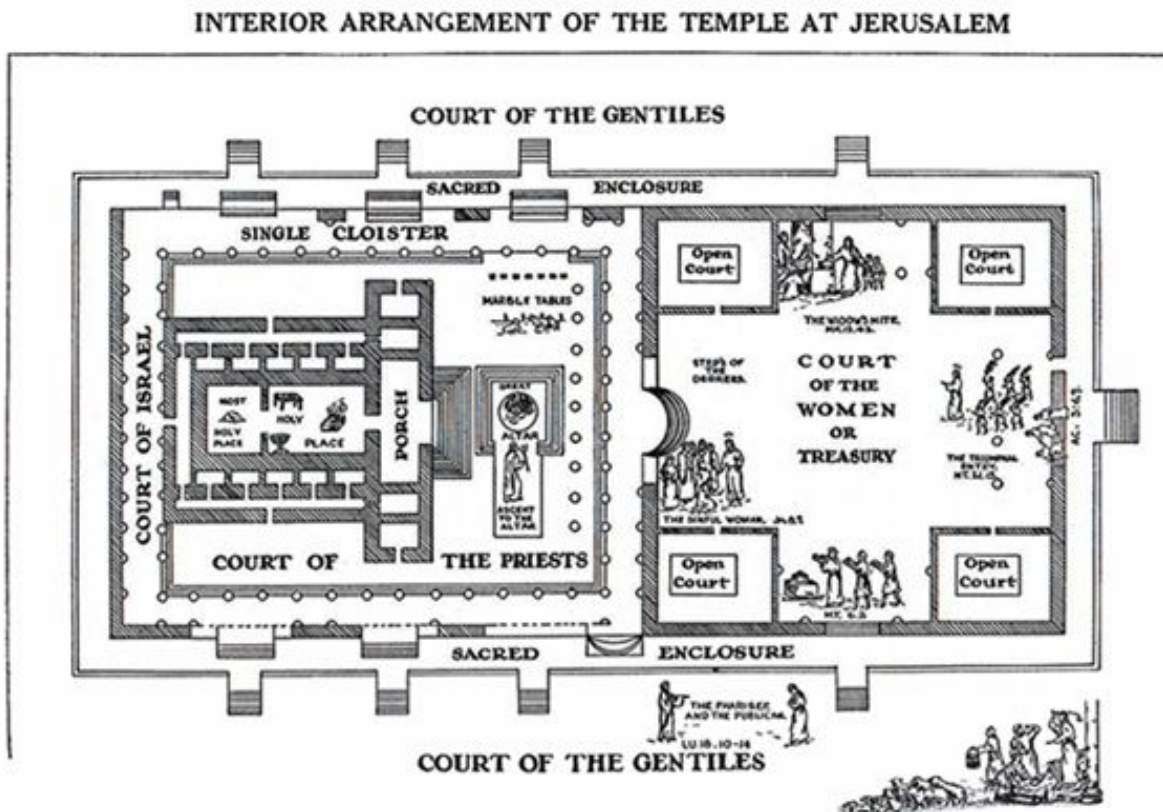
As was mentioned in the sermon verses 19-21 give us three images of our relationship to one another, each demonstrating an increased level of intimacy. First, we are fellow citizens. (So,

we have a shared King.) Second, we are member of God's household (i.e. we're family...so we have a shared Father). Third, we are joined together as a building, a temple, that is the dwelling place of God (so we are one with God, having joined the great dance of the Trinity).

The concept of peace is an important one throughout Scripture. Our friends at The Bible Project have a nice little video explaining the Biblical concept of peace. Here's the link if you'd like to check it out (it's part of their Advent series...click on the video for "Shalom/Peace")

<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/the-advent-series/>

What is important to understand is that Peace is not just a nice byproduct of our faith. It's central to our understanding of what God is up to, what He's always been up to, and where everything is headed. To miss this is to really not understand the Christian faith.



- Q. Who is someone you are lacking peace with? What will it take for there to be peace?**
- Q. Ideally, people should be able to look at the Church to see a model of Peace. Tragically, that notion is almost laughable. What do you think it would take for that to become the case? What are you willing to do to make that possible? Can you think of a higher priority for the Church at this juncture? Explain.**

Q. As you think about and understand your “identity” what competes for top label/description with your identity as one who is “in Christ”. Or, what “badge” do you like to wear? Why is that? (Also, because our skills at self-deception are so honed it might be good to ask others who know us well what they observe in us regarding our “identity”.)