

# "CHRISTIAN UNITY: PART 2"

## Ephesians 2:11-22

In her book *Grapes of Wrath Or Grace*, Barabara Brokhoff tells the story of a group of American tourists were taking a bus tour in Rome led by an English-speaking guide. Their first stop was a basilica in a piazza (public square or a marketplace). It was surrounded by several lanes of relentless Roman traffic. After they were all safely dropped off, the group climbed the steps for a quick tour of the church.

Then they spread out to board the bus, which was now parked across the street from the church. The frantic guide shouted for the group to stay together. He shouted out to them...

**You cross one by one, they hit you one by one. But if you cross together, they think you will hurt the car! They won't hit you." There is always much to be said for unity, especially unity of the Spirit.** Barbara Brokhoff, *Grapes of Wrath or Grace* (CSS Publishing, 1994), page 12

The problem that Paul addressed in the Body of Christ there in Ephesus was a lack of unity. The fact that both Jews and Gentiles were saved created a massive amount of tension in the church. How did this antagonism between Jews and Gentiles get started in the first place? Well, it goes all the way back to God's choice of Abraham.

**Genesis 12:1–3... Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."**

So, God promised to build a new nation through Abraham. The Jewish people would become God's covenant people.

**Amos 3:2... "You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."**

From the beginning the Lord intended for them to share the truth about God with the nations of the world. He blessed them that they might be a blessing to the world. They

accepted their divine blessings but not their divine mission—to be a light to the Gentile nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3; 62:1–2).<sup>1</sup>

How deep seated was this hatred that the Jews had for the Gentiles? Consider Jonah, the Jewish prophet. When God called him to preach to Nineveh, the prophet fled in the opposite direction. After he finally obeyed the Lord and saw the whole city repent because of his preaching, he got angry because God spared the wicked Gentiles of Nineveh.

**Jonah 3:10–4:3... When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. 1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. 3 "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."**

When a Jew entered Israel after traveling, he would often shake the dust off his sandals and clothing in order not to contaminate the Holy Land with Gentile dust. Because Samaritans were partly Gentile, most Jews would go far out of their way to avoid traveling through Samaria. If a young Jewish man or woman married a Gentile, their families would have a funeral service, symbolizing the death of their child as far as religion, race, and family were concerned. For fear of contamination, many Jews would not enter a Gentile home or allow a Gentile to enter theirs.<sup>2</sup> This problem could have suffocated the New Testament church from its very inception. How did Paul address it?

**Paul set out to establish a theological basis for unity among Christians.** He established the fact that all people—*Jews* and *Gentiles*—are separated from God. In fact, they are spiritually dead pawns of Satan and his evil world system (2:1-3). Christian unity flows out of a clear understanding that everyone and I mean everyone is saved by God's grace through faith in Christ alone (2:4-10). A.W. Tozer wrote...

**Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned,**

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [Ephesians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 69.

<sup>2</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [Ephesians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 70.

**not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So, one hundred worshipers meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become "unity" conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.**

Jesus has brought Jews and Gentiles together because they both are dependent on Him for salvation. Since they are unified in salvation (2:14–18), they should also be unified in the church (2:19–22). With this in mind, let's dig into the text.

I want to build this teaching around three key words. Hopefully this will help you to recognize the importance of Christian unity. Let's begin with the word...

## **1. ALIENATION**

In the first ten verses of Ephesians 2, Paul has discussed the salvation of sinners in general, but now he turns to the work of Christ for Gentiles in particular. Most of the converts in the Ephesian church were Gentiles, and they certainly felt the tension that was generated by the Jewish believers.

**Ephesians 2:11–12... Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.**

These Gentile believers were "alienated" in several respects. They were...

**Alienated from Christ**—The Ephesians had been immersed in the worship of the goddess, Diana, and, before receiving the Gospel, they knew nothing about Christ. Those who claim that pagan religions are just as acceptable to God as the Christian faith will have a problem here, for Paul cites the Ephesians' Christless state as a definite tragedy. But then, keep in mind that every unsaved person, Jew or Gentile, is "outside Christ" and that means condemnation.

**Alienated from Israel**—God called the Jews and built them into a nation. He gave them His laws and His blessings. A Gentile could enter the nation as a proselyte, but he was not born into that very special nation. Israel was God's covenant nation, in a way that was not true of any Gentile nation then or now.

**Alienated from covenants**— While the blessing of the Gentiles is included in God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3), God did not make any covenants with the Gentile nations. The Gentiles were "aliens" and "strangers"—and the Jews never let them forget it. Many of the Pharisees would pray daily, *"O God, I give thanks that I am a Jew, not a Gentile."*

**Alienated from hope**—Historians tell us that a great cloud of hopelessness covered the ancient world. Philosophies were empty; traditions were disappearing; religions were powerless to help men face either life or death. People longed to pierce the veil and get some message of hope from the other side, but there was none (1 Thes. 4:13–18). The Gentiles had no hope such as that expressed by the psalmist...

**Psalm 71:5... For You are my hope; O Lord God, You are my confidence from my youth.**

**Alienated from God**—The heathen had gods aplenty, as Paul discovered in Athens (Acts 17:16–23). Someone in that day said that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. Paul wrote this in his letter to the Corinthians...

**1 Corinthians 8:4–6... Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 6 yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.**

The pagan, no matter how religious or moral he might have been, did not know the true God. It is worth noting that the spiritual plight of the Gentiles was caused not by God but by their own willful sin. Paul said the Gentiles knew the true God but deliberately refused to honor Him (**Rom. 1:18–23**). Religious history is not a record of man starting with many gods (idolatry) and gradually discovering the one true God. Rather, it is the sad story of man knowing the truth about God and deliberately turning away from Him! It is a story of devolution, not evolution.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis give the story of the decline of the Gentiles; and from Genesis 12 on (the call of Abraham), it is the story of the Jews. God separated the Jews from the Gentiles that He might be able to save the Gentiles also. Hear the words of Jesus...

**John 4:22... "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews."**

The first word that we build our understanding of the need for unity in the church is alienation. It's not pretty but that's where we have got to begin. Here's the second word...

## **2. RECONCILIATION**

The "but now" in Ephesians 2:13 parallels the "but God" in Ephesians 2:4. Both speak of the gracious intervention of God on behalf of lost sinners.<sup>3</sup>

### **Jews and Gentiles were reconciled to each other**

**Ephesians 2:13... But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

While they were far from God and without hope (2:12), Jesus has now enabled them to be brought near to God. Jesus made this possible through his blood, which relates back to 2:11 and the idea of a covenant.<sup>4</sup> In verses 14-18, Paul describes the greatest peace mission in history. The Lord Jesus Christ not only reconciled Jews and Gentiles, but He reconciled both to Himself in the one body, the church.<sup>5</sup>

**Ephesians 2:14–15... For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one* and *broke down the barrier of the dividing wall*, **15** *by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace***

The divine ordinances (the Old Testament Law and its practices) given by God to Israel stood as a wall between the Jews and the other nations (the Gentiles). In fact, there was a wall in the Jewish temple, separating the court of the Gentiles from the rest of the temple areas. Archeologists have discovered the inscription from Herod's temple, and it reads like this:

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<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Mangum, ed., [\*Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament\*](#), Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Eph 2:11–13.

<sup>5</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 23.

**No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.**

It was this wall that the Jews thought Paul and his Gentile friends crossed when the Jews attacked him in the temple and threatened to kill him (**Acts 21:28–31**).<sup>6</sup>

In order for Jews and Gentiles to be reconciled, this spiritual barrier had to be demolished. *Jesus did this on the cross once and for all.* The cost was the blood of Christ. When He died, the veil in the temple was literally torn in two, and the wall of separation and alienation (figuratively) was torn down. He and He alone was able to do this because...

**\*He fulfilled the demands of the Law in His righteous life**

**\*He bore the curse of the Law in His sacrificial death (Gal. 3:10–13; 1 Peter 2:24)**

Jesus is the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles!

**Romans 10:11–13... For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."**

**Acts 4:12... "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."**

Peter learned this lesson the hard way. God sent Him to the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. He sent him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles who were gathered there...

**Acts 10:34–43... Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)— 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing**

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<sup>6</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 23–24.

good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. **39** "We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. **40** "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, **41** not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. **42** "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. **43** "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

The Jewish Christians reprimanded Peter for going to the Gentiles and eating with them (Acts 11), and representatives of the churches gathered for an important conference on the place of the Gentiles in the church (Acts 15).

**Must a Gentile become a Jew to become a Christian?** Their conclusion was, "No! Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way—by grace through faith in Jesus Christ." The enmity was gone! <sup>7</sup>

### **Jews and Gentiles were reconciled to God**

**Ephesians 2:16... and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.**

It was not a question of the Gentile becoming a Jew to become a Christian, but the Jew admitting he was a sinner like the Gentile. "For there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22–23). The same Law that separated Gentile and Jew also separated men and God, and Christ bore the curse of the Law.<sup>8</sup>

**Ephesians 2:17–18... AND 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 our access in one Spirit to the Father.**

By removing our sin, Christ gives the Jew and Gentile peace with each other and both have open access to God (Rom. 5:1–2). This amazing access *to* God the Father *through* God the Son *by* God the Spirit (2:18).

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<sup>7</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 23.

<sup>8</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 25.

**1 Peter 3:18...** For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

**Romans 5:1–2...** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2** through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

This reminds me of that moment when the heavy veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:50–51; Heb. 10:14–25). Reconciliation is complete!

### 3. UNIFICATION

Paul repeated the word "one" to emphasize the unifying work of Christ...

\*"made both one" (Eph. 2:14)

\*"one new man" (Eph. 2:15)

\*"one body" (Eph. 2:16)

\*"one Spirit" (Eph. 2:18).

In the closing verses of this chapter, Paul gives three pictures that illustrate the unity of believing Jews and Gentiles in the church.<sup>9</sup> Stott wrote...

**This complete equality of Jew and Gentile in the new community is the "mystery" which for centuries had been kept secret, but which now God had revealed to the apostles, especially to Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (3:4-6).**

*The Cross of Christ*, p. 195.

The first picture comes into view in verse 19...

**Ephesians 2:19...** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household

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<sup>9</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 25.



**One nation (19a)**—Israel was God's chosen nation, but they rejected their Redeemer and suffered the consequences. The kingdom was taken from them and given to "a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (**Matt. 21:43**).

**Matthew 21:43...** "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it."

This "new nation" is the church, "a chosen generation ... a holy nation, a peculiar people" (Ex. 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9). In the Old Testament, the nations were reckoned by their descent from Shem, Ham, or Japheth (Gen. 10). In the Book of Acts, we see these three families united in Christ.

**\*In Acts 8, a descendant of Ham is saved, the Ethiopian Eunuch**

**\*In Acts 9, a descendant of Shem was saved, Saul of Tarsus**

**\*In Acts 10, the descendant of Japheth was saved, Cornelius**

Sin has divided mankind, but Christ unites by His Spirit. All believers, regardless of national background, belong to that "holy nation" with citizenship in heaven.<sup>10</sup>

**Philippians 3:20–21...** For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; **21** who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Look at verse 19 once again for the next picture...

**Ephesians 2:19...** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household

**One family (19b)**—Through faith in Christ, we enter into God's family, and God becomes our Father. This wonderful family of God is found in two places, "in heaven and on earth" (Eph. 3:15). Living believers are on earth; believers who have died are in

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<sup>10</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 25.

heaven. We are all brothers and sisters in the one family, no matter what racial, national, or physical distinctions we may possess.<sup>11</sup>

**Ephesians 2:20–22... having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.**

**One temple (20–22)**—Today, through His Spirit, God dwells in the church, the temple of God. God does not dwell in man-made temples, including church buildings (Acts 7:48–50). He dwells in the hearts of those who have trusted Christ (1 Cor. 6:19–20), and in the church collectively (Eph. 2:20–22).

**\*Jesus is the Foundation (1 Cor. 3:11)**

**1 Corinthians 3:11... For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**

**\*Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone (Ps. 118:22; Isa. 8:14).**

The cornerstone binds the structure together; Jesus Christ has united Jews and Gentiles in the church. The temple Christ is building will last forever...

**Matthew 16:18... "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.**

**1 Peter 2:4–5; 9–10... And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.... 9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.**

Is unity in the church an easy thing to attain and to maintain? I don't think so. If anything, the fact that the New Testament records so many Christians struggling and failing to be unified should tip us off that unity is anything but easy. We only need to

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<sup>11</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 25.

read through the letters of Paul to see this. Here's just a small sampling of how often he addresses the issue of unity:

- He reproves the Corinthians for their "quarrelling" and "divisions" (**1 Corinthians 1:10–11**).
- He warns the Galatians against the dangers of "rivalries, dissensions, divisions" (**Galatians 5:20**). He entreats "Euodia and . . . Syntyche [in Philippi] to agree in the Lord" and pleads with others to intervene (**Philippians 4:2**).
- He instructs the Colossians, "Forgive each other as the Lord has forgiven you" (**Colossians 3:13**).
- And he exhorts the Ephesians not to indulge in "corrupting talk" so as to "not grieve the Holy Spirit of God," and to put away "all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander . . . along with all malice" (**Ephesians 4:29–31**).

I love what Paul wrote later on in this letter...

**Ephesians 4:1–3... Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

We must be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace!

October 12, 2022

CFBC... *"Made for More"* (Wednesday night Ephesians study)