

life group study guide

ON3 CHURCH **May 27, 2012**



ON3 Church – Unity in the Trinity, Unity in the Church

“Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.” Ephesians 2:18

Background: Saved by Grace. Eph. 2:1-10. Key verses: *“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”* Eph. 2:8-9.

In the first ten verses of chapter 2, Paul reminds the Ephesians that all of them, Jew and Gentile alike, are saved only because of the grace of God, through the work of Christ on the cross. Therefore, there is no room for pride – pride in heritage, ancestry, gifts, talents, or in however relatively righteous one might think himself or herself to be.

The Jew is saved by grace and the Gentile is saved by grace. The son or daughter from a long line of Christians is saved by grace and the newest believer without a single Christian relative is saved by grace. *There can be no room for pride in the Body of Christ!* As one commentator in the *NLT Study Bible* says:

“Christians live and die dependent on God’s grace. Salvation is God’s gift and can never be earned. The most important things in life – forgiveness, a right relationship with God, acceptance into God’s family as his child, eternal life, spiritual understanding, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the promise of God’s blessing now and forever – are all gifts of God for those he has chosen and made his own by his grace. There is nothing we can do to get these things for ourselves.”

Study: Oneness in the Church in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Eph. 2:11-22.

1. Unity through Christ’s Work. Eph. 2:11-15. Key verse: *“For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separates us.”* 2:14.

In the New Testament world, Jews and Gentiles were at least as alienated as are Jews and Muslims in much of the world today. In the Jerusalem Temple, there was a literal wall that separated the court of the Gentiles from the Temple itself. Inscriptions warned Gentiles that they were liable to death if they went beyond that boundary. This wall symbolized their separation – they were in fact “far away from God,” “without God,” and “without hope.”

But Paul reminds all his readers, then and now, of this essential truth: *The only hope of both Jew and Gentile is the blood of Christ!*

Problem for Jews: Many of them were not transformed – they were only “religious” (circumcised) outwardly – read verse 11 and also Colossians 2:11. Jesus condemns this same attitude when he tells the very religious Pharisees that *“inside you are filthy – full of greed and self-indulgence!”* Matthew 23:25-26.

life group study guide

Problem for Gentiles: Separated from God – *“without God and without hope.”*

Solution: The satisfying of God’s wrath – His righteous and holy hatred of sin – by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross in our place. He took the penalty for all sinners, both the religious Jew and the pagan Gentile, and He does the same today for all who believe. Christ’s work results in *“creating in himself one new people”* (verse 15).

Q: What dividing “wall of hostility” in the world today would you most like to see removed? Are there any such walls in the church? At Kingsway? If so, what are they and how can a good understanding of this passage help to remove them?

Q: What kind of problems, outlook, and future did Gentiles face before Christ came? What about non-Christians today? Into what do they put their hope, if any? How do think the Jewish Christians felt when Gentiles began to enter the church, especially when they did not observe practices such as circumcision?

2. Peace with God. Eph. 2:16-18. Key Verse: *“Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.”* 2:18.

As we saw above, both Jews and Gentiles need a Savior – and the only Savior of all who believe, from Adam on down to today, is Jesus Christ.

Verse 16 – Both groups are reconciled – that is, made right – with God *“by means of his death on the cross.”* This reconciliation with God also enables reconciliation with others – otherwise there will always be hostility.

Verse 17 – Both groups – those far away from God and those near to Him – are brought the Good News of peace by Christ. What did this mean then and what does it mean now? Does the most “righteous” non-Christian need salvation as much as the “vilest offender?”

Q: How has Christ destroyed hostility and made peace possible for all people?

Verse 18 – All three Persons of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are involved in this reconciliation – the bringing near; the uniting with Christ; the breaking down of walls; the restoration of peace. Here is how the Amplified Bible has this verse: *“For it is through Him (Christ) that we both [whether far off or near, Jew or Gentile] now have an introduction (access) by one [Holy] Spirit to the Father [so that we are able to approach Him].”*

- The Father: He sends Christ on His mission to save – Jn. 3:16. As sinners we were cut off from His presence. Now we have access. Read Heb. 10:19-22.
- The Son: By His death for us on the cross, He takes our sin and we are declared righteous, and thus able to come near to God the Father. 2 Cor. 5:21.
- The Holy Spirit: Christ promised us that when He ascended to the Father, He would send God the Holy Spirit to those who believe. The Holy Spirit regenerates us and indwells the believer at baptism, empowers Christians for Holy Living (sanctification), and provides spiritual gifts as necessary for the building up of the church. Read Jn. 14:15-26; Acts 2:38; Eph. 4:7-13. The Holy Spirit, promised by God to indwell each believer, is “God with us” today.

life group study guide

3. Results of God's Peace – A New Temple Built of All Believers. Eph. 2:19-22. Key Verse: *“Together, we [Jews and Gentiles] are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.”* 2:20.

There is no longer a physical temple to which believers must go to worship. All believers – past present and future, young and old, male and female, Jew and Gentile, of all ethnicities – are part of the new Temple, the Body of Christ. He is its cornerstone and each Christian is an important part.

Q: How would a person of different background be accepted at Kingsway Christian Church? If that person was a Christian, would they feel like an important piece of our part of the “holy temple?”

Think about the following from well-known Christian authors:

“We have to revise our ideas of the holy community to conform to what is revealed in Scripture . . . We cannot impose our paradisiacal visions of hanging out with lovely, upbeat, and beautiful people when we enter a Christian congregation . . . God's way of working with us in community has virtually nothing to do with the world's idea of getting things done, of what 'works' and what doesn't . . . God hasn't changed His modus operandi of choosing the 'low and despised in the world' (1Cor 1:28) to form His community . . . We who want to get in on what God does in the way God does it in all matters of community, will have to give up pretensions of shaping an organization that the world will think is wonderful as we parade our accomplishments to the tune of 'worship' or 'evangelism'.” Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, p. 266.

An excerpt of a letter from senior tempter (demon) Screwtape to his nephew tempter Wormwood, concerning his “patient,” a new Christian: *“All you then have to do is keep out of his mind the question 'If I, being what I am, can consider that I am in some sense a Christian, why should the different vices of those people in the next pew prove that their religion is mere hypocrisy and convention?' . . . He has not been anything like long enough with the Enemy [God] to have any real humility yet. What he says, even on his knees, about his own sinfulness is all parrot talk . . . He still believes he has run up a very favourable credit-balance in the Enemy's ledger by allowing himself to be converted.”* C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 8.

Q: What would it be like for you to be the only one of your “group” (socially, economically, ethnically, etc.) to be a Christian? Could you “hang out” with other Christians who were not very much like you? Would you still be a Christian if were unpopular or illegal?

Q: Do you ever see yourself as having a favorable “credit-balance” with God? How do you see other Christians with other vices or other bad habits? Do you base your hope of salvation entirely on Christ's work or do you combine it with something else (niceness, works, etc.)?

Q: If Paul wrote a letter to Kingsway, what things might he say?