

August 17, 2025

“The Two Made One”
Lesson 3

Ephesians 2:11-22

Intro

In about AD 51 (about 12 years before the writing of the Ephesian letter), Paul was part of a meeting called the Jerusalem Council. The meeting was called to answer a pressing question: Was it required for Gentile men to be circumcised in order for them to be considered Christians? In other words, did they have to become Jews first in order to be Christians?

The Council decided that circumcision was not required for Gentiles to be Christians. But this decision was not fully accepted by all the Jews. At the time of Paul’s letter, some were teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised to be part of God’s family. Paul thus sees the need to address this question once again in this letter to the Ephesians.

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

1. vs. 11: One of the biggest causes of division in the church was identity: Jew or not Jew
The Greek word translated “Gentiles” is also translated as “nations”
In this line of thinking, there were Jews, and then there were all the other nations
Being a Gentile “by birth” indicates that these men were not circumcised
Circumcision was a sign of being under God’s covenant, first given to Abraham
When Paul says that circumcision is “by human hands”, He is addressing a key issue
There is something more important than the removing of the foreskin
The removal of sin can only be done by God
The removal of sin should result in “circumcision of the heart” (Rom. 2:29)
2. vs. 12: This verse shows how separated the Gentiles were from the Jews
They were not a part of the citizenship of Israel
They therefore did not have a right to the covenant and the promise
Before Jesus came, they were “without hope and without God”
They were unable to connect to God as the Jews were able; they didn’t have a hope
3. vs. 13: The Gentiles were “far away” from God before Christ
Because of Jesus’ blood sacrifice, they have been “brought near”
The next verse describes who Christ is to us and what He has done
4. vs. 14: The idea behind Jesus being our peace is to satisfy an injustice or a wrong done
This comes from an OT pattern of “making good” if an animal dies due to another’s fault
This OT pattern is used to show Jesus’ death was an atonement for sin, a “making good”
Thus, “He himself is our peace”
Christ’s death was not just for Jews, but for Gentiles also
Sin and its solution is of more importance than whether or not one is circumcised
He compares Christ’s work as “destroyed the barrier”, breaking down a wall
Sin separates God and man, but Jesus broke down that wall on the cross

5. vs. 15: Paul shows here that Jesus' purpose in dying wasn't to have two different groups
They were to be one group in Christ, since He died for all
Paul says He "set aside...the law with its commands and regulations"
Paul notes here the same point made by the Jerusalem Council 12 years earlier
The OT laws and rules, like circumcision, are no longer at work
The things in the OT law that distinguished Jew from Gentile are not longer valid
Christianity is not about rule keeping, but about living faith daily
The result of Christ's work on the cross is a "new humanity"
People are no longer Jew or Gentile; they are one in Christ
6. vs. 16: Reconciling means to repair a broken relationship
First, Christ reconciled us to God "through the cross"
We can now have a peaceful relationship with God
Second, a restored relationship with God allows for reconciliation between peoples
We are to be "one body", says Paul
Therefore, the body shouldn't be fighting against itself
There is no place for hostility or division between people saved by God who reconciles
7. vs. 17: Paul uses the same distance comparison here as he did in vs. 13
Those who were "near" were the Jews, and those "far away" were the Gentiles
The near or far relationship was because of the covenant
The Jews had a covenant with God, so they were near to Him
The Gentiles did not have a covenant, so they were far from God
But Jesus came and preached the gospel, which brought peace and reconciliation
Part of His preaching can be seen through His actions
His death and resurrection were the things that brought peace to all
This was needed for both groups, not just for one of them
8. vs. 18: The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and the heart of each believer is key
His presence is what unifies believers together, no matter the differences in background
The Holy Spirit was promised to "all flesh" in Joel 2:28-32
Peter quotes this passage in his sermon on Pentecost in Acts 2
When people are "in Christ", they partake of the same Holy Spirit
There isn't one Spirit for Jews, and another for Gentiles
This truth is crucial, as Paul says in ch. 4 to keep "the unity of the Spirit"
9. vs. 19: Because of what Christ did and the presence of the Holy Spirit, a change has occurred
"You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people"
No follower of Jesus is to be a "foreigner" or "stranger" to any of God's people
They equally share the promises of God
If they are of the same "household", that implies they are of the same family
Families live together and have tasks which benefit all the members of the family
This analogy puts all three phases of Paul's argument together
Christ provided redemption / reconciliation on the cross
The Holy Spirit was given to each believer to empower them in their lives
This leads us to work with and for each other, to serve

10. vs. 20: A household lives in a house, which has a foundation

The church is a “building”, a house whose foundation is the apostles and prophets
The things they wrote and spoke are present in the Bible
This is what the church is to use as its bedrock, the truths which are built upon
And Jesus is the “chief cornerstone”
Everything depends upon Him, is built upon Him

11. vs. 21-22: Paul finishes the analogy by showing how each follower connects

Each of us is a piece, one of the stones, the Jesus uses to make His building, His church
Paul says we are “being built together”—we are not separate entities, but part of a whole
Together we become God’s “holy temple”, the place where the Spirit resides

Application: The church is a global, multiethnic, transcultural, multiclass collected of men and women, adults and children. All who are in Christ have been reconciled by His blood, and have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, permitting us to partake of God’s promises. We are God’s family, the household of God. Being in a family takes work sometimes. And we have our own issues in the church today that can cause division and tension; circumcision isn’t one of those for the church anymore. Paul’s instructions for overcoming a divisive issue of the first century have great value for us today. We are to respect and embrace each of our fellow “stones” that are part of the great building Christ has and is erecting.

Prayer: Father God, help us to do whatever is necessary to pursue the Spirit’s unity in the bond of peace. Help us to follow Your will as we help build Your family, which is Your temple. In Jesus’ name, Amen.