



Intro video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVW1OdsGSPo>

## Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of barriers usually divide different groups of people in our society? Have you noticed any similar (or different) divisions in the church?
2. How much have you thought about the distinction between Jews and Gentiles? Why do you think this is such an important concern for Paul here? (cf. Eph 1:10).
3. Looking at v11-12, how does this passage describe life for non-Jews outside of Christ? What do you make of this? For those of us who aren't Jewish by background – is this how we view our pre-Christian past?
4. Why is v13 such wonderful news? What dimension does it 'add' to the wonder of 2:1-10? How does this reinforce the sheer grace described in 2:8-10?
5. How do v14-18 showcase the power and uniqueness of Christ's reconciling work? You might like to think about
  - a. What has Christ done?
  - b. Why is his death central?
  - c. What his death has achieved?
6. What is the outcome of Christ's reconciling work in v19-22? How do the various images used help us grasp the unity and purpose of the church? (Why might this be especially striking in the Ephesian context where the great Temple to Artemis stood as one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world?)
7. How does this passage make us think and feel about the church?
8. Are there 'dividing walls' between different groups in our church experience that we need to repent of?
9. How practically can we foster unity in diversity in our context? As a group? In the wider congregation? In our new building?

## NOTES

### Ephesians 2:1-10 Christ has brought peace through his death – creating one new humanity.

- Gentiles were far off from God's people but now brought near by Christ's blood (11-13)
- Christ brought peace & reconciliation through the cross to create one new humanity (14-18)
- So Gentile believers are now members of God's household & holy temple (19-22)

After illustrating God's incomparably great power seen in raising & exalting Christ (1:19-23) and in raising & seating Christians with Christ spiritually (2:1-10), Paul now shows us another dimension of God's power at work. Not only has God raised individual believers, Christ has also reconciled communities - Jew and Gentile (to God and to one another) – through the cross. Remember: UNITY of all things under Christ is the great goal of the universe (1:10).

(11-13) We see the full extent of Gentile alienation: without the sign of circumcision, separate from the Messiah, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants, hopeless and God-less. What a devastating picture of separation from God and the people of God. "But now" (13) those who were far away have now been brought near.. How? By the blood of Christ. What a remarkable transformation! Not only from death to life (2:10), but also from total exclusion to total inclusion.

(14-16) Why is it "in Christ Jesus" that this has happened? Because Christ himself IS the peace. He personally has made the two groups (Jew & Gentile) one, he has destroyed the barrier between them. The OT law (with its food and other purity laws) was a clear sign that Gentiles were excluded from the people of God, unclean etc. But Christ in his own body has fulfilled the law and taken the penalty for disobedience. The "dividing wall" (illustrated in the Jerusalem temple with its outer courts for the Gentiles) – has truly been destroyed. Indeed, both Jew and Gentile (those near and far) are recipients of the peace preached by Christ (17) and through him (alone) have full access to the Trinity (18).

(19-22) The result of this ground-breaking peace and reconciliation? Gentile believers are NO LONGER foreigners etc (cf. 11-12) but a) fellow citizens b) fellow members of God's household, c) part of the one new holy temple in the Lord being built together on Christ and the apostles and prophets. This temple (aka the church) is where God dwells by his Spirit (far more spectacular even than the great temple of Artemis in Ephesus which was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world).

**FOR US:** Yet again we see the "once .. but now .. so now" structure that shows the dramatic transformation brought about by God in salvation. Here the focus is on the **person and death of Christ** accomplishing **peace and reconciliation**. The great result is **unity** in the church (which is therefore the great calling to live out in the second half of Ephesians, 4:1). Here it is a reminder of **what we now are**.

### TEACHING TIPS :

- (1) **Try to feel the weight of Gentile exclusion and corporate belonging!** Individualism comes naturally to most in the West. It is challenging to think that we (Gentiles) were not only dead in sins but also excluded from God's covenant community by birth, citizenship and access to the promises. What a hopeless, godless plight that was and is. This passage reminds us that salvation is a historical unfolding of the purposes of God (to incorporate Gentiles into the blessings of Abraham/Israel) to be a saved community (not just individuals).
- (2) **Help us feel the sheer wonder of Christ's death.** Look for the specific ways this passage showcases Christ and his cross work. "He himself is our peace". "He has destroyed the barrier" "Set aside in his flesh" "Reconcile them both [Jew and Gentile] through the cross". Christ is both our peace, the one who achieves peace and the preacher of peace! And can you hope for anything better than v18?!
- (3) **Reflect thoughtfully on unity & diversity in our church.** The clear implication of this passage is that ALL old divisions (not just Jew and Gentile) are overcome by Christ and his blood. So unity in diversity (neither uniformity nor division) is the great and unique reality in the church. But old divisions die hard (whether black/white, rich/poor, male/female, old/young, Jew/Gentile) and sinful people like us seek to rebuild barriers even where Christ has torn them down. Can we reflect humbly and well what such divisions might be in a church context like ours? How can we begin to live out the diverse unity we already have?

## HINTS FOR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In society: class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, education, job type, football teams (!) can all divide groups of people and create hostility. What do we see in church? What's our actual experience? Key issues might be nationality, class/education, and even whether we're married/single/have kids. It would be good to begin an honest conversation. Though maybe wise to set expectations that this is a starter question (to which we can return later on, in light of this passage).
2. I guess for many of us (non-Jews) we rarely if ever think of ourselves as Gentiles. Though within the Bible's story (of promises to Abraham, Israel, the line of David etc) those particularities are a big deal. It reminds us that salvation isn't simply an abstract philosophy but the historical outworking of the purposes and promises of God to specific people to create a specific people (who would ultimately come from all nations). The detail matters (and highlights even more the wonder). Since UNITY under Christ is the ultimate purpose for the universe, unity between Jew and Gentile (which was a major social/cultural/religious distinction) was an important historical but also theological concern.
3. It's utterly bleak and hopeless isn't it? No sign of the covenant, no Messiah, no citizenship in God's people, no covenant of God's promise. Without hope and without God in the world. Not just dead (2:1-10) but excluded and far off from God and the people of God. You may not have time for each detail but don't miss the cumulative effect! I suspect we don't usually think in such corporate and cultural/ethnic terms about our past (especially if we're not Jewish by birth, for 'Gentile' is a term that only really makes sense in Jewish-inspired categories of thought). But Paul clearly thinks it's crucially important for understanding God's salvation and Christ's work (and his own ministry in 3:1-13).
4. It's a complete reversal. Just as dramatic as the dead being made alive (2:1-10), the far off being brought near (13). Indeed into the very heart of the full access of the temple (18, 22). The added dimension is corporate/communal: God isn't just saving individuals, he's creating a new humanity (a new community in Christ). Given how hopeless the Gentile pre-Christian state was, yet again it must be the sheer and unfathomable grace and power of God that has achieved this. No other hope.
5. You realise that only Christ and only the crucified Christ can bring about this total reconciliation of Jew and Gentile with God and with one another.
  - a. Christ himself has made peace. Indeed, he himself IS our peace.
  - b. Only possible through his sacrificial death (a kind of peace offering) ending hostility vertically (towards God) and horizontally (Jew and Gentile). The focus on "his blood" (13), "in his flesh" (15) and "through the cross" (16) showcase the centrality of his DEATH in bringing peace.
  - c. Peace, reconciliation, destroying divisions and bringing access to God the Holy Trinity (18) all flowing to Jew and Gentile together through the cross.
6. Formerly excluded Gentiles are now fellow-citizens, and fellow members of the household and even part of the true Temple (growing together, built on Christ and his apostles) as the place where God dwells. For a city so proud of its temple this is a far greater 'building' to esteem and honour and celebrate – the church! (as unimpressive as it may have seemed compared to the Artemisium).
7. Isn't this a beautiful picture of a reconciled community from all backgrounds united in diversity and peaceful overcoming former hostilities? That is what the church IS according to this passage.
8. This is a chance to pick up on reflections from the start (and maybe fresh ones since). If you look around on a Sunday (or midweek) or in terms of hospitality/friendship/shared life: what divisions or separate groupings might we see? Not necessarily wrong to want to spend time with others "like us" – but wrong if that becomes a barrier to exclude/ignore/not express and live out unity with those "different"....
9. In the coming season (new building, overcoming restrictions with opportunities to welcome one another into homes for meals etc)... what might this unity in diversity look and result in practically? Remember this isn't tick box virtue signalling – this is living out our real identity as the one people of God in Christ. Take time to reflect on your group life together and dream together what a Christ-exalting blood-bought future community could look like (by God's grace). And then pray! (cf. 3:20-21)