**Brought to Life; Brought Together**

**Christ is the Great Reconciler**

Ephesians 2:11-16

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We are in our series, Brought to Life; Brought Together, from the New Testament letter Ephesians, looking at chapter two today so if you have your bibles, turn to Ephesians 2:11-22. In this text today, we see that God reconciles enemies and making one new humanity through the cross. The passage has two main points. First, he describes the Gentiles relationship to God before Christ came (11-12) and then he describes the Gentiles relationship to God after Christ came (13-16). As we think about Advent, focusing our hearts on Christmas, remember that Jesus taking on human flesh more important than any other gift you give or receive this year. In the Advent reading we read of Simeon who longed for the Messiah and when he held the baby Jesus, he could die in peace. This passage describes why he longed for the Messiah, because in the Messiah, in Christ, God has created a new humanity by removing what divides us.

**Before Christ Gentiles Were Separated and Excluded (11-12)**

Paul starts out with therefore, remember at one time. He wants them to think about, reflect on where God has brought them from. That as Gentiles, they were dead in sin yet God made them alive and saved them by grace for a life of good works. At one time they were hopeless apart from Christ and before Christ came, they had no hope. First, they were maligned as *uncircumcised* by Jews (11). This was a derogatory slur by Jews, because circumcision marked the Jews as God’s chosen people. Yet the way that Paul describes Jews, what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands, is his way of pointing out the insufficiency of this physical marker as guaranteeing their acceptance with God (cf. [Rom. 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%202.28-29); [1 Cor. 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor.%207.19); [Phil. 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil.%203.3); [Gal. 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal.%205.6)). The New Testament contrasts what is made by human by what is made by God in the New Testament with ‘by human hands’ and ‘not made by human hands’ ([Mk. 14:58](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%2014.58); [Acts 7:48](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%207.48); [17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2017.24); [Heb. 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb.%209.11), [24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%209.24)). So, to something is made by human hands is to say that God has not created it. In other words, physical circumcision is no longer spiritually important.

Not only were they uncircumcised, they were also *unprivileged* in two ways (12). They were *separated from Christ*. Separated means to be alienated or estranged from God ([Eph. 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%204.18); [Col. 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col.%201.21)). Separated from Christ is then described as *alienated* from the commonwealth of Israel or citizenship of Israel. The hope of Christ, Messiah, was a privilege belonging to Israel and Gentiles were excluded from the hope of the Messiah and being part of God’s people. Secondly, they were also *excluded* from the covenants, strangers to the covenants of promise[[1]](#footnote-1) without hope and without God in the world. The covenants belonged to Israel so the Gentiles had no hope and nor did they worship the true God. The covenants of promise were God's pledge to be faithful to his people and to fulfill his word to them. So, to summarize, before the coming of Christ all Gentiles separated from God and God’s covenantal people and so were without hope and without God.

**After Christ, Gentiles Are United and Included (13-16)**

First he tells us that *Christ changed everything* (13). But now points to a shift in redemptive history. At one time they were far off, separated from God but now in Christ, they have access to God and every spiritual blessing and privilege by the cross. Christ has changed everything for these Gentiles and for us. Then he describes more specifically what he means that God has brought us near (14-16). First, *Christ reconciles enemies*, that is, he himself is our peace (14).[[2]](#footnote-2) Christ reconciles enemies. Christ has done this by *removing the hostility* (15). Jesus Christ is our peace because he has made Jews and Gentiles one, one new man, and one body by breaking down in his flesh the wall of hostility, the Mosaic law, by abolishing or nullifying the law. He has done this in his flesh, that is, his death on the cross. The Mosaic law created a fence that divided Jews and Gentiles. The cross crushed that fence, nullifying the law that separated the two.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Mosaic law pointed Israel to their need for a Savior Messiah but because of sin they twisted it into a law of works making them feel superior to Gentiles. Paul is a prime example of someone who took their status as a Jew and wore it as a badge of pride (Phil 3:4-6). He saw himself as superior, better because he was a Jew who excelled at being moral.

The cross nullified the law, rendering it powerless by making it no longer binding, it fulfilled its purpose of pointing Israel to Christ. This does not mean that God’s moral law is removed. But the Old Testament law must be read and interpreted in light of the New Testament.[[4]](#footnote-4) Jesus fulfilled the law in his obedient life and fulfilled the law in his sacrificial death. Christ nullified the law to *create one new humanity,* so that in himself, Christ might create one new man in the place of two, making peace (15). The cross nullified the source of hostility and made the two into one (14), created one new humanity (15), and reconciled us both to God in one body (16). For Paul, there are three groups of people in the world: unbelieving Jews, unbelieving Gentiles, and the new people of God, the Church (cf. [1 Cor 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor.%2010.32); [Col 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col.%203.11); [Gal 3:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal.%203.28); [6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%206.15)). New man is a new humanity as a corporate identity, the church. This new humanity is a completely new creation in which ethnic distinctives are irrelevant. The cross reconciles enemies, making them friends, family, members of his body as part of his eternal plan to unite all things in Christ (1:10) .

Questions for Life Groups:

1. What is the big idea of Ephesians 2:11-16?
2. How did the law create hostility between Jews and Gentiles?
3. If God gave the law to Israel, why did it create hostility between Jews and Gentiles?
4. What was the primary purpose of the law?
5. How did Christ abolish the law?
6. How did Christ make all people one, one new humanity, one body?
7. What does the words one, one new humanity, one body mean?
8. How is God speaking you through this passage?
9. How does this passage support the command to make disciples

1. The plural covenants points to a series of Old Testament covenants: with Abraham ([Gen. 15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen.%2015); [17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen%2015.17)), Isaac ([Gen. 26:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen.%2026.2-5)), Jacob ([Gen. 28:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen.%2028.13-15)), and David ([2 Sam. 7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Sam.%207)). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The emphasis on peace is striking. The word peace is uses four times (14, 15, and twice in 17). He also uses related ideas, made us both one (14), created one new man (15), and reconcile us both to God (16). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. the Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made . . . It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death (William Barclay, 125). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The law is both abolished and fulfilled in Christ. This is a very simple explanation to a very complicated subject, how does the Mosaic law relate to new covenant Christians. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)