



## SESSION 1

# WHEN RACES COLLIDE

### ▶ ***The Point***

Our relationship with Christ should be reflected in our unity with one another.

### ▶ ***The Passage***

Ephesians 2:11-22

### ▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

For most of us, our source of information about other cultures doesn't extend much further than the menu at the ethnic restaurant. After all, who doesn't love to eat? Our world is full of wonderfully creative and different ways to prepare food. Of course, food is just one thing that distinguishes each culture from others. Other external customs and traditions include music and dress. We're wonderfully unique.

I pastored a church in a town that was divided between the fan bases for two sports teams. Their rivalry was real! No fundamental difference existed between the two groups. They were all people made in God's image. Their hostility was over something external: their team colors!

Unfortunately, we often focus on the externals—those outward things that make us look different—while paying little attention to those things we might share in common. In the Book of Ephesians, Paul pointed us to the most important thing Christians share: a relationship with Christ!

### ▶ ***The Setting***

Ephesians 2:11-22 focuses on the alienation that existed between Jews and Gentiles in the first century. Paul described the animosity that existed and how God had remedied the situation through Christ. Jesus loves everyone equally and died for all. He makes no distinctions between races, ethnicities, or nationalities. Paul painted a vivid picture of how Christians should behave when confronted with those who appear to be different.

## *What does the Bible say?*

### ***Ephesians 2:11-22***

**<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—**

**<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.**

**<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

**<sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility**

**<sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,**

**<sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.**

**<sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.**

**<sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.**

**<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,**

**<sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,**

**<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.**

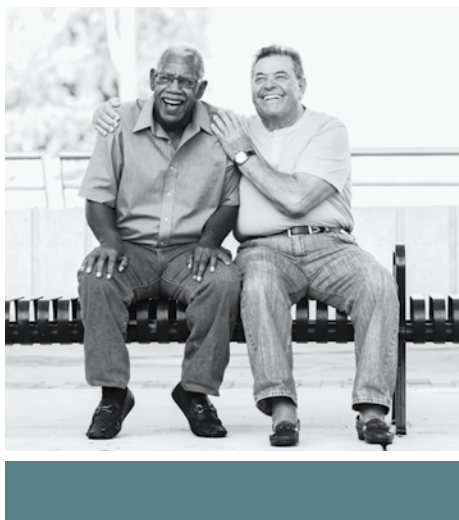
**<sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.**

# GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 69 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “**What do you appreciate most about other cultures?**” Allow time for each person to respond.

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” on page 70 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of genuine worship by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 70 of the PSG: “**Our relationship with Christ should be reflected in our unity with one another.**”

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, collect some print ads or video clips for ancestor research (either genealogies or DNA tests) to prompt discussion, encouraging group members to talk about their heritage. Focus on the things we all share in common as image-bearers of God. Brainstorm ways members can encourage reconciliation between people of various backgrounds.

**Note:** Sample clips are available online. You can find a link at our blog: [BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra).

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item 6**, the “Engaging Culture” poster, and give a brief overview of the seven sessions in this study.

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by asking the Lord to help us see one another the way He does. Thank Him for the reconciliation He makes possible for all of us through Christ.

## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

Want to know about biblical culture, people, archaeology, and history? *Biblical Illustrator* has articles that tie to each session in this study at [lifeway.com/BI](http://lifeway.com/BI).

## ENGAGING CULTURE

- ▶ **WHEN RACES COLLIDE**  
*Ephesians 2:11-22*
- ▶ **WHEN LIFE IS EXPENDABLE**  
*Exodus 1:16-17, 22-29*
- ▶ **WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES OVERWHELM**  
*Psalms 42:3, 6-8; 43:3-5*
- ▶ **WHEN SUBSTANCES TAKE OVER**  
*Ephesians 5:15-21*
- ▶ **WHEN MARRIAGE IS QUESTIONED**  
*Genesis 2:18-25*
- ▶ **WHEN MATERIALISM CONSUMES**  
*1 John 2:12-17; 3:16-18*
- ▶ **WHEN FALSE RELIGIONS DECEIVE**  
*1 John 2:18-29*

**TIP:** When helpful, use this “Notes” column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## NOTES

### Ephesians 2:11-12

***<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.***

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 2:11-12 on page 71 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 71 of the PSG: **“How does racial prejudice impact the church’s witness?”**

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from page 71-72 of the PSG. No matter what country of origin, racial or ethnic background, or the socioeconomic class we were born into, we all entered this world as sinners separated from God. We were:

- ▶ **Without Christ.** Paul had earlier noted that we “were dead” in our sins (Eph. 2:1). We were bound by sin, in bondage to the world, and, therefore, we were separated from Christ.
- ▶ **Without citizenship.** We were “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.” God’s blessing was for Israel’s common good. But as long as we were lost in sin, we could not share in that good.
- ▶ **Without the covenants.** Covenant is one of the most important words in the Bible. A covenant is an agreement in which God binds Himself to a promise.
- ▶ **Without hope.** Our greatest hope is found in Christ, but as long as we are sinners separated from Him, that hope is absent.
- ▶ **Without God.** The phrase “without God” does not mean God had forsaken us, but that we have forsaken Him. It does not mean He did not know us, but that we did not know Him.

**TRANSITION:** Without Christ, our differences can divide us. The next verses will teach us that Christ treats us equally and gives us all access to the Father.

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**

*In what ways does a common hope help us overcome our differences?*

## Ephesians 2:11-12 Commentary

**[Verse 11]** The animosity, which existed, between the Jews and the Gentiles in the first century demonstrates that without Christ, our differences can divide us. Paul began by calling on the Gentiles within the Ephesian church to **remember** their former state, before they put their faith in Christ. They were **Gentiles in the flesh**, also known as **“the uncircumcision.”** This second label was clearly intended to point out the bodily distinction between the Gentiles and the Jews, **the circumcision**. Paul also noted that circumcision was merely an outward sign, something done **in the flesh by hands**.

Beginning with the Old Testament patriarch Abraham, God gave the Israelites the rite of circumcision as the prerequisite for entering into and a symbol of their covenantal relationship with Him. (See Gen. 17:9-14.) The Jews took great pride in being God’s chosen people; the people of the covenant, and over time developed an air of superiority to others outside their faith. By Paul’s time, the Jews felt an intense hatred toward the Gentiles. The Jews saw the Gentiles’ uncircumcision as the symbol of the Gentiles’ separation from God. To the Jews, the Gentiles were dogs, and to the Gentiles, the Jews were enemies of the civilized world.

**[Verse 12]** Although Paul had previously noted in this letter that all human beings stand deserving of God’s wrath for their sins (see Eph. 2:1-3), here Paul identified five conditions of the Gentiles’ alienation from God in relation to the Jews prior to the coming of Christ. First, Gentiles were **separated from Christ**. They were separated from God’s covenantal people through which the promised Messiah would come. (See Rom. 9:4-5.) Second, they were **alienated from the commonwealth of Israel**. The Gentiles were excluded from the people of the covenant. Israel was God’s chosen people, a nation founded by God Himself, in which the Gentiles had no part. Third, excluded from God’s covenant people the Gentiles were **strangers to the covenants of promise**. The Gentiles had no knowledge of or part in the covenantal promises God had given to Israel. Fourth, cut off from the covenant people, the Gentiles in their sinful condition were without **hope**. Separated from the people of the covenant as well as the Scriptures God had given to His covenantal people, the Gentiles had neither the guidance of how God expected His people to live (how the Jews were to relate to God) nor the promise of the hope for redemption. The Gentiles’ state seemed hopeless; they were alone, **without God in the world**. The Greek term translated *without* does not indicate the Gentiles’ rejection of God. Rather, the term indicates a lack of knowledge concerning who God is and how people are to relate to and worship Him.

By noting the Gentiles’ condition without Christ, Paul was pointing out their hopeless condition before God acted to make a way for them to be reconciled to Himself through faith in Christ. It was Paul’s attempt to get the Gentiles to recognize who they once were compared to who they were now in Christ. It also emphasized the magnitude of God’s grace in redeeming the Gentiles.



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Ephesians 2:13-18

NOTES

Dotted lines for taking notes.

***13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.***

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 2:13-18 on page 72 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** Question #3 on page 72 of the PSG: **“When have you seen the love of Christ tear down barriers between people?”**

**RECAP:** We should not assume that we, or our churches, are free from racial prejudices. In the early church, the Greek “widows were being neglected in the daily distribution”(Acts 6:1). We may have similar biases, but we should reject any temptation to value one group over another. Through Christ we all have access to the Father.

**DO:** Direct group members to complete the activity, “My Preference” on page 73 of the PSG to help group members put our differences in perspective. *For each of the following pairs, choose the one you prefer. [A list of pairs are printed in the PSG.] Say:* “While this is a fun activity, if we aren’t careful our preferences concerning people’s personal traits can lead us to make distinctions that lead to disunity. What are some personal characteristics we sometimes favor that are really more of a preference than a choice of right or wrong? How can we differentiate between things that should really matter to us and things that shouldn’t?”



**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 74 of the PSG: **“How does our reconciliation with God help us reconcile with others?”**

**TRANSITION:** The next verses remind us all believers are one in Christ—and we should act like it.

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**

***What’s the relationship between having peace with God and peace with others?***



## Ephesians 2:13-18 Commentary

**[Verse 13]** The antidote to conflict between people is the sacrificial death of Christ. While Paul focused specifically on the Gentiles who were **far off**, now **in Christ Jesus** the way was open for all people to draw **near** to God by repentance and faith through **the blood of Christ**.

**[Verses 14-15]** Jesus broke down the barrier between all people and God, as well as the barrier of hostility that existed between people. Through repentance and faith, we can be reconciled to God. (See Rom. 5:1,10.) Jesus also **made us both** [Jew and Gentile] **one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility** that existed between Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus accomplished this two-fold reconciliation **in his flesh**, that is, through His bodily crucifixion, death, and resurrection. (See Col. 1:22.) He nullified the laws of the old covenant with their strict requirements. There was no hope for salvation through the law, since it required perfect obedience. Through His death and resurrection, Christ made the law of no effect.

Neither Jesus nor Paul denigrated the law and Jesus Himself said that He had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. (See Matt. 5:17; Rom. 3:31.) He lived a perfect life of obedience to the law, something that we could never do. Through faith in Him, we receive His perfect righteousness and He removes all our sins. Through the working of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are enabled to live a life of obedience to God (however, not perfect obedience; even as believers, we will still at times wrestle with sin). Both Jews and Gentiles have access to this new life by faith and grace. Therefore, they are all equal before God, **one new man in place of the two**. Those who were formerly separated and at odds with each other are now in Christ brothers and sisters. There is now **peace**.

**[Verse 16]** The purpose of Christ's sacrifice and the establishment of this new humanity was to **reconcile** both Jew and Gentile to God in **one body**, which is the church. Salvation occurs at the moment a person repents of his or her sins and places his or her faith in Christ. At that moment, the person becomes a new creation (see 2 Cor. 5:17) and part of Christ's body, the church. (See Col. 3:15.) Jesus accomplished this at **the cross**, where He put to death the **hostility** that existed between God and humanity (see Rom. 5:10; Col. 2:13-14), as well as the hostility between Jews and Gentiles.

**[Verses 17-18]** Jesus and His disciples proclaimed the good news (gospel) of **peace**. Everyone is separated from God because of sin. (See Rom. 3:9-20.) The gospel is the only remedy. (See Col. 2:13-14.) It calls all people to repentance and faith in Christ.

God makes no distinctions among His redeemed children. All are one in Christ (see Gal. 3:28) and have access to God **the Father**. This access is made possible **through him**, through Christ's death on the cross. (See Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:19-22.) Jesus is the only way of access to God the Father. (See John 14:6.)

Access to God the Father is **in one Spirit**. The Holy Spirit indwells all believers, testifying that we are in fact God's children (see Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15-16) and interceding on our behalf. (See Rom. 8:26-27.) This same Spirit brings unity among all believers. (See Eph. 4:3-4.)



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## NOTES

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### Ephesians 2:19-22

**19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 2:19-22 on page 75 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary for these verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand what it means that we were “strangers and aliens.”

**RECAP:** People all around us are trapped in sin, unconscious and unaware of the death that awaits them. God has called the church to work together with the same urgency. We are one in Christ—and we should act like it.

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item 7**, the “One in Christ” poster. Divide group members into subgroups of three or four people each. Invite group members to work with their subgroup to compile a list of characteristics that should be present in the body of Christ. Ask members to share their group’s responses aloud while a volunteer records these onto the blank “bricks” of **Pack Item 7**.

**DISCUSS: Question #5** on page 75 of the PSG: **“What are some practical steps our group can take to positively impact race relations in our community?”**

**GUIDE:** Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“Our relationship with Christ should be reflected in our unity with one another.”**



#### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

**What challenges might we face as we try to model the example of Christ with those who are different from us?**

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## Ephesians 2:19-22 Commentary

[Verse 19] Having described how God has made both Jews and Gentiles one in Christ, Paul moved on to emphasize that believers should live out this shared unity. (See Gal. 3:28.) Before coming to faith in Christ, the Gentiles were like **strangers** and **aliens**. *Strangers* referred to those who had no permanent standing in a society. Their presence was only temporary. *Aliens* may have taken up residence in a location, but they were not assimilated into the society. In both cases, the people had a common need—to belong.

However, in Christ the Gentile believers are **fellow citizens with the saints**. As believers in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, were **members of the household of God** and enjoyed all the benefits, privileges, and responsibilities that entailed. Whereas before Christ they had been estranged, in Christ the Gentile believers were full members of God's family and fellow heirs.

[Verse 20] Paul encouraged these new believers by reminding them about the foundation on which they rested: **the apostles and prophets**. The apostles and prophets received and taught the Word of God. They were the early churches' first preachers and teachers. What they received, preached, and taught we have today in the Old and New Testaments.

Next, Paul identified Christ as **the cornerstone**. This is the prophetic designation of the Messiah. The "cornerstone" was the description of the coming Savior. (See Ps. 118:22; Isa. 8:14; 28:16.) The Greek word literally means "at the tip of the angle" or "lying at the extreme corner." It referred to the stone that held an entire building together.

[Verse 21] The cornerstone provides stability and direction to the entire building. The **whole structure** is most likely the body of Christ (the church). Every believer has his or her place in this building, which is **a holy temple in the Lord**. (See 1 Pet. 2:4-7.) This is true both for the church in the sense of the universal church made up of all believers in all times and for individual local communities of believers as well.<sup>1</sup>

[Verse 22] **In him** reinforces the idea that this new humanity, which is being introduced, is held together by the Lord Himself. He is the chief cornerstone and the architect of the building, the church.

The Greek verb translated **being built together** is in the present tense, which indicates a continuous process. The church is continuing to be built for the purpose of the **dwelling place** of God's Spirit, a residence of the Lord. In the Old Testament, God's residence was the Jerusalem temple; however, with the coming of Christ, His residence is in the church. We are being built together to be a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

Just as the Jewish and Gentile believers came from different backgrounds but were one people in Christ, the same is true for believers today. Although we come from many backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities, and so forth, as believers in Jesus Christ we have equal standing before God and are brothers and sisters in Christ.



5 minutes

# LIVE IT OUT

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to page 76 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following activities:



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- ▶ **Admit.** Racism still exists. Confess to God any prejudice you feel toward another person.
- ▶ **Meet.** Get to know your neighbors and coworkers who have a different ethnicity than yours. Don't treat them differently—treat them simply as a neighbor or coworker. You can build bridges by focusing on what you share in common.
- ▶ **Invite.** Invite someone of a different race or ethnicity to come with you to your Bible study group. The smaller group environment is a great way for them to build relationships with other believers.

## Wrap It Up

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the final paragraph from page 76 of the PSG:

We can all do more to understand one another and learn to cross cultural boundaries in healthy ways. Let's allow our common lineage as God's people to help us be a unified family of God!

**PRAY:** Conclude by thanking the Lord for the wonderful way He created us in His image yet with such beautiful diversity. Ask Him to make our group a vessel for racial reconciliation.



**Free additional ideas for your group are available at**  
[BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra)