



Brought Near **TO BE** Built Up

NO LONGER STRANGERS

Gather

AS YOU BEGIN, PRAY TOGETHER.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION.

How many countries have you been to? In how many do you have citizenship?

READ GOD'S HOLY WORD.

Ephesians 2:11-22

¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands) — ¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Scripture Reflection

A SHORT SUMMARY OF KEY IDEAS FROM THE PASSAGE.

The gospel is not merely vertical reconciliation; it is horizontal reconstruction. Christ Himself is our peace, breaking down dividing walls and creating one new humanity. Paul speaks to deep ethnic and religious hostility and insists that hostility does not have the final word. In a polarized culture, this text exposes how quickly we baptize our tribal instincts. The church is not a collection of like-minded individuals but a Spirit-built temple of former strangers. Unity is not sentimental; it is costly, embodied, and sustained by Christ's cross. If the gospel cannot reconcile enemies, it has not yet been fully understood.

Opening the Word

WE RETURN TO THE SCRIPTURES AS GOD'S LIVING WORD TO US TODAY.

- Does anything stand out or surprise you from the passage?
- In vv.11-12, Paul asks his Gentile audience to "remember" their previous condition. What specific terms does he use?
- In the Jerusalem temple, there was a physical dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles called the *soreg*. How does Paul describe Jesus destroying this wall in vv.13-15? What was the legal barrier He set aside to make this peace possible?
- The result in vv.15-18 was not to make Gentiles into Jews, but to create "one new humanity." What does this suggest about the identity of a Christian relative to their ethnic or cultural heritage?
- In vv.19-22, Paul uses three metaphors: citizens, family members, and a temple. How does each metaphor help you understand who we are "in Christ"?
- What does it mean that Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone (v.19)?

Quotation

PAUSE TO REFLECT ON THIS THOUGHT.

“And so Paul is given this beautiful picture that there’s no more dividing wall between ethnicities because the blood of Jesus – the same blood of Jesus that forgives sin – is the same blood of Jesus that creates brothers and sisters with different colored skins.”

Derwin L. Gray, Healing the Racial Divide

Responding to the Word

WHAT IS THE SPIRIT SAYING TO US THROUGH THE WORD?

- A 2020 Baylor University study showed that less than 25% of churches are multiracial, where no one racial or ethnic group comprises more than 80% of the congregation. Why might a homogenous church actually be a poor representation of the Spirit-built temple Paul describes?
- Paul emphasizes that we were all once “foreigners” and “strangers.” How might reflecting on your own former alienation from God change the way you view people who are on the “outside” (whether outside your religious circles, socioeconomic circles, ethnic circles, etc.)?
- How does Paul link our reconciliation with each other to our reconciliation with God? Can one exist without the other?
- What are specific “dividing walls” in our city, neighborhood, or church family that currently feel most impenetrable?
- If Jesus “himself is our peace” and He forged it through the cross and by His blood, then unity is clearly not cheap. Where have you found it difficult or costly to maintain unity with a fellow believer? How might reflecting on the gospel help you to bear that cost?

Invitations & Challenges

HERE ARE A FEW WAYS THE SPIRIT MIGHT BE INVITING OR CHALLENGING US TO RESPOND THIS COMING WEEK.

- In our day, some areas of polarization feel insurmountable. But remember, the Jew-Gentile hostility was not just a difference of opinion—it was a centuries-old, culturally and ethnically entrenched, and often violent separation. If the cross could bridge that divide, then it is sufficient for the divisions we face today. What is one “horizontal” relationship in your life that is currently characterized by “hostility” (even if it’s just cold indifference)? What would it look like to apply the “horizontal reconstruction” of the gospel to that relationship this week?
- Do you feel distant from God, like you could never be close to Him because of the things you’ve done or the things done to you? Do you ever feel “without hope and without God in the world” (v.12)? If you feel like there is some kind of hostility between you and God, take heart! Jesus himself can be your peace. Reflect on what it means for you personally that Jesus put to death the hostility between you and others and you and God on the cross. Rejoice in the good news that through Jesus you can have access to the Father by the Spirit.
- Practice of Jesus: Your invitation this week is to practice hospitality. Jesus regularly broke bread with outsiders such as “tax collectors and sinners” (Mark 2:15-17). We live in Houston, perhaps the most diverse city in America, during a very polarized moment in our history. One of the most practical (and costly) ways of living out the reality of Ephesians 2:11-22 is by welcoming strangers and those on the “outside” in. Who is someone on the “outside” of your circles who you could host in your home for a meal?

Pray

THANK OUR HEAVENLY FATHER FOR HIS GRACE AND FAITHFULNESS AND ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO EMPOWER YOU TO FOLLOW JESUS THIS WEEK.

Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your marvelous plan to make “one new humanity” out of all people. We are sorry for the ways that we have lived with enmity against our neighbors and against You. We would despair in our alienation from one another and from You, were it not for Jesus and His work through the cross. Instead, Lord, we now rejoice that we are being joined together into Your holy temple. Holy Spirit, come fill us anew, and reveal to the world the beauty of Jesus through Your people. Send us out to invite others into Your household. Amen.

Songs

THIS WEEK, TAKE SOME TIME AS A GROUP OR ON YOUR OWN TO DWELL ON THE TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH SINGING OR LISTENING.

Cornerstone – Hillsong

The Church's One Foundation – S.J. Stone

Who You Say I Am – Hillsong

(the digital guide has YouTube links)

Daily Scripture Meditation

THEMATIC READINGS TO AID IN REFLECTING ON THE TRUTHS DISCUSSED TODAY WITH THE LORD THROUGHOUT THE WEEK.

Mon, May 11 | Genesis 15

Tue, May 12 | Genesis 17

Wed, May 13 | Acts 15

Thu, May 14 | Romans 4

Fri, May 15 | Colossians 2:6-15

Sat, May 16 | Revelation 7:9-17

SERIES PLAYLIST

USE THIS LINK TO AID IN YOUR WORSHIP THROUGHOUT THE SERIES.

[Spotify Playlist](#) (also on the Small Group Guides page on the fpchouston.org website)

Going Deeper

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO EXPLORE THE TEXT AND IDEAS FROM TODAY.

[Healing the Racial Divide by Derwin L. Gray](#) – A four-part, Christ-centered walk through Scripture, seeing God's heart for a reconciled multiethnic family on RightNow Media.

Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope by Esau McCaulley – A personal and scholarly testament to the power and hope of Black biblical interpretation.

[The Bible and Race by Timothy Keller](#) – A four-part series of articles on justice and race from 2020.