



Lesson 5: The Gospel – Phase 2

Teacher's Edition

Overview: Paul moves on from discussing the individual reconciliation that happens with God when a believer is saved, and moves on to discuss how the gospel now brings him into a reconciled relationship with those around him in the church. God does this so that the church can be unified and grow together under the headship of Christ.

Purpose: Your group should understand that God's salvation goes not only reconciles individuals with God, but that it reconciles them with each other as well. They should recognize that God expects them to be at peace with other believers because of the unity he has bought for them.

Introduction

The amount of wars and the toll of life taken in the course of human history defies comprehension. According to a 2003 New York Times article: "Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history. . . At least 108 million people were killed in wars in the twentieth century. . . at the beginning of 2003 there were 30 wars going on around the world."

Into the chaos of hostility and war comes the message of Christ, a message that spells the end of war and ushers in peace. God's answer to the hatred and division in the world today is reconciliation with fellow man through Christ's work. You see, the gospel is not all about you. The gospel isn't even all about you and God. God's purpose in saving you and bringing you into a relationship with himself was not just so that you

could have a right relationship with him. He wants you to have right relationships with others too. Last week we saw the first phase of the gospel: bringing you into a right relationship with God. This week we see the second phase of the gospel: bringing you into a right relationship with others, especially with those who used to be hated enemies.

How does the gospel bring unity with others? Why does God care so much that believers get along? What does it say about him when we don't?

One of the difficulties of working through a book one piece at a time is that sometimes you miss how the pieces interrelate. For example, Paul is building a doctrinal foundation for the applications he will make later in the book. In our study, we are looking at the doctrine now, and the application later. As Paul wrote Ephesians, it was all one connected sermon. At the very beginning of the applicational section of this letter, Paul will command believers to live in the unity that has been purchased for them (4:1-3). Here in the doctrinal section he is laying the foundation for that command. The teaching of the Scripture along these lines is: Since you have been made one in Christ, live unified. In this lesson, we will focus more on the doctrinal truths with some application; when we come to chapter 4, we will focus more on the applicational truths while reminding ourselves of the doctrine.

The only command found in the entire three chapters is found here in verse 11: remember.¹ Paul wants Gentiles to remember that the position they have now they have not always had. Things used to look very different for people who did not have Jewish parents. What God has done for them he did of his own gracious will, and they should be thankful for their inclusion.

Do believers today rejoice that they are a part of God's plan even though they aren't Jewish? Why or why not?

Now God desires for Jews and Gentiles to be one. In fact, four times in five verses he uses the word "one" and three times in five verses he uses

¹ Some translations repeat the command in verse 12 for clarity sake, but in the Greek the word only shows up once.

the word “peace.” While Jews and Gentiles used to be at odds, in part because of God’s plan and in part because of human sinfulness, now God has brought the two together.

Structure: [Consider beginning the outlining section by walking your group through the three part division and helping them see the big picture before walking through the main points. Last lesson had an outline of *Before salvation/After salvation/Process of Salvation* This week the theme is similar in that it is *Before salvation/Process of Salvation/After salvation*]

I. Gentiles before reconciliation (2:11-12)

Just as Paul did when talking about the individual’s life before salvation, he uses the Greek word (*pote*) twice, translated as “once, at one time, at that time” (2:2, 3, 11, 13). In other words, before salvation not only were people individually dead in their sins, but as Gentiles they were also separated from the blessings of God in Israel. Wiersbe puts it best when he says “The one word that best describes the Gentiles is *without*. . . without Christ. . . without citizenship. . . without covenants. . . without hope. . . without God”

A. Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.

In the Old Testament era, God’s specially chosen people were Israel. They had a relationship with God that was different than any other nation on the face of the earth (Deuteronomy 4:7, 34; 14:2). This was seen particularly through the sign of circumcision. Israel was essentially unique among the nations for this custom.

B. Strangers of the covenants of promise.

Being a part of Israel meant not only that you were God’s specially chosen people, but that all the blessings that God gave were concentrated in you. God made multiple covenants throughout history with Noah (Genesis 9), Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17), Israel (Deuteronomy 28-29), and David (2 Samuel 7). Noah was a covenant with all mankind, and Abraham’s covenant included the nations. But the covenant with Abraham, Israel, and David all focused on God’s relationship with Israel specifically. It used to be that if you wanted to be a part of what God was

promising people, you had to be Jewish. That changed, however, when the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31ff, cf Luke 22:20) came and included Gentiles as fellow members. To a Jewish person this would have been shocking

C. Christless, hopeless, godless

Although there were some Gentiles who were saved in the Old Testament (Uriah, Rahab, Ruth, possibly Nebuchadnezzar and Naaman) and a few even in the New Testament before the church (Cornelius, Lydia), it certainly was the exception and not the norm. For the most part, if you were born during the Old Testament era to non-Jewish parents there was no hope for you. Part of the division between Jew and Gentile was actually God's doing. God gave his blessings to Israel and didn't give them to other nations. Without Christ and without God, these Gentiles were also without any hope for their future and for their lives.

What was the attitude God desired Israel to display to the nations? What did their attitude end up being? In what ways do we face the same danger?

Application: We should be grateful for the fact that God has chosen to include us in the plan of salvation. God didn't have to open his blessings up to us. Israel didn't deserve them, and we don't deserve them. Realizing that God has opened up the way of salvation to all peoples ought to rejoice our hearts. Much like the wonderful blessings Paul discusses in chapter 1, our inclusion in the plan of God as Gentiles is something that we have always known and simply accept as our right. But God doesn't owe us a place in his plan. Today you ought to be excited that God chose to include us!

II. God's reconciliation of Gentiles (2:13-18)

As Wiersbe points out, the "but now" of 2:13 parallels well the "but God" of 2:4. Although formerly the Gentiles they were not right with God and were outside the covenant community, now peace has been made between them and God and God's people. Previously Jews and Gentiles had hated each other ("hostility" vv 14, 16).

Why are people hostile towards others? Why were Jews and Gentiles hostile? Why are Christians hostile toward other Christians? To the world? What does it say about God when we are hostile towards others?

A. How Christ made peace.

1. Christ made peace through his sacrifice.

Christ's peace comes to us through "his blood" as he kills the hostility between us "through the cross." Our salvation brings us into a right relationship with God, and by bringing us into a right relationship with God, Christ opened up the way for us to have right relationships with others. His sacrifice allowed us the opportunity to draw near to God (1 Peter 3:18), and as we draw near to God to draw near to others.

2. Christ made peace by removing the law.

The legal standings of the law made it so that if a person wanted to become a full-fledged follower of God, there were a lot of hoops to jump through. They would have to not only be circumcised, but they would need to keep dietary, clothing, shaving, and festive celebrations. God's laws created an entire culture that would be difficult, though not impossible, for a pagan to assimilate to. But when Christ died and the temple veil was torn (Matthew 27:51), the need to keep all of the ritualistic expectations of the law passed away. In this new environment, unity between Jew and Gentile was possible and could flourish.

Does this mean we no longer have any commands to follow? How do we know which commands should be obeyed and which ones we need not worry about?

3. Christ made peace by offering the same salvation to all.

Part of the way in which Christ builds unity is by "preaching peace to those who are far (Gentiles) and those who are near (Jews). In other words, both Jew and Gentile need God's

salvation. The ground is level at the foot of the cross; men, women, Jews, Gentiles, slaves, free, everyone needs to be saved (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11).

Application: Christ creates peace with others today similarly. He brings us into a right relationship with God, and then into a right relationship with others. As we look at a world that is being torn apart, it's important to remember that true peace is only possible when there's a God who demands it and followers who are ready to listen. Looking at the racial and national tensions we see today, the greatest hope we have for unity and peace among people is the understanding that we all stand united by the same gospel, are all indwelt and obedient to the same Spirit, and as we do that, we will find true peace.

Why connection is there between our relationship with God and our relationship with man? What other Scriptures develop this theme?

B. Why Christ made peace.

The reason Paul gives that Christ has gone through what he has is to create one new man in the place of two. Whereas previously the world was divided between Jew and Gentile, now there stood a new, unified entity: the church (1 Corinthians 10:32).

If God does all things for his glory, in what way does a unified church bring him glory?

Remember, God's ultimate plan for the universe is to unite all things in Christ (1:10). God wants everything to be harmoniously under the control of Christ the King. One day that will be fully realized in the millennial kingdom and then the eternal state, but until then God wants to see that in the church.

Does this mean it's wrong to separate from brothers in Christ who hold different doctrines (such as infant baptism)?² What should separation from these Christians look like? What should it not look like?³

III. Gentiles after reconciliation (2:19-22)

Paul describes the unity of the believers and the privileges that belong to both with three illustrations.

A. Gentiles are part of God's country.

Gentiles had once been foreigners and aliens, but now they are citizens. Paul builds on the citizenship imagery he used earlier in verse 12. Whereas once Gentiles had been outsiders, they were now part of God's country. Believers are elsewhere described as citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:13-16). Citizenship is another privilege that we take for granted, but this wasn't the case when Paul wrote. Not everyone in the Roman empire was a Roman citizen. In fact, being a citizen was a high privilege (cf Acts 22:25-29, where Paul's guard is shocked to learn he is a citizen, and the group around him is terrified that they have bound him since he is a citizen. See also Acts 16:35-39).

How does thinking of ourselves as citizens of heaven affect our life on earth? How does it change the way we look at our earthly citizenship as Americans?

B. Gentiles are part of God's household.

Paul uses multiple words throughout the last four verses that in Greek have *oikos* (House/household) as part of their root. These

² One key to emphasize here is the degree of difference. Catholics who teach salvation by works are heretical (although Catholics, who truly hold Catholic dogma, are not brothers). Presbyterians who hold to infant baptism are wrong. Another Baptist who disagrees with me on the extent of the atonement is different. Our responses to each should probably be graded as well.

³ These are sticky questions! Don't ask them unless you've had time to formulate your own thoughts on the matter.

words include “foreigner” (one who is outside the house), “member of the household,” “build on” (the Greek verb for build has the word *oikos* in it), “household,” “build together,” and “dwelling place.” There is a strong emphasis here on being a part of God’s family. Scripture builds this analogy elsewhere as well. God is our father (Ephesians 2:18), Christ is our brother (Hebrews 2:17), and we are adopted (Ephesians 1:5). Jews and Gentiles are now siblings, on equal footing before an impartial father.

C. Gentiles are part of God’s temple.

When we hear that Christians are the temple of God, we assume that each person individually is a temple of God. While the Bible does sometimes speak in this way (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), it is more common for the New Testament to think of the whole church as the temple of God. As Americans, we tend to think about Christianity in very individualistic terms, “I am the temple.” But God wants us to live together in unity with other believers, “We are the temple.”

Illustration: If you were to ask the coach of an NFL team if you could play in the NFL, depending on how desperate he was he might offer you tryouts. If you clarified that you wanted to play in the NFL but didn’t want to be on a team, he would probably give you a puzzled look and walk away shaking his head. You can’t play football as a solo person, unless perhaps you’re playing catch. But if you want to play in a league, you have to be on team. That’s just how it works. You can’t be a Christian and not be a part of the church. It’s just not possible. To try to live the Christian life on your own is like trying to play in the NFL as an individual player. That’s not the way it works.

Conclusion: It’s important to keep in mind where all of this is going and what it means for us today. Paul is going to urge believers in the second half of the book to live worthy of their calling, a calling he has been explaining for 3 chapters. Studying what God has done for Jew and Gentile, and the peace and unity we can now experience with all those who name the name of Christ should create a gratitude and a hope to live

rightly for God. Knowing what God has done for us should develop within us a sense of joyful obligation to live in light of the wonderful gifts we have been given, and to specifically to seek peace with all because our unity has already been achieved for us in Christ.