

The Cross and the Church



SABBATH—JULY 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ephesians 2:1–3; Ephesians 2:14–16; Ephesians 4:3; Romans 10:14, 15; Ephesians 2:17–19.

MEMORY VERSE: “At one time you were far away, but now you have been brought near to God by the blood [death] of Jesus Christ. Christ has made peace between us. He has brought both Jews and non-Jews together into one people” (Ephesians 2:13, 14, WE).



**Because of the Cross,
Jesus makes us
one new family
known as the church.**

HAVE YOU WONDERED how new Christians lived and felt in Bible times? To help you understand their experience, make this picture in your mind: you are a non-Jew living in Jerusalem during New Testament times. You are Greek. Not long ago, you learned about the God of the Jews. You accepted Him and stopped praying to false gods. Today, you walk across the beautiful area outside the Jerusalem temple. You praise God and want to worship Him inside His temple. Just then, you see a stone wall in front of the temple with signs on it. The signs are written in Greek and Latin. The message on the signs says: “No foreigner may enter. Any foreigner who tries to enter will be killed.” When you read these words, you feel separated and shut out from God.

In Ephesians 2:11–22, Paul says that Jesus died on the cross to destroy the “walls” that separate people from God and from each other. The Cross brings peace between Jews and non-Jews (Ephesians 2:15). Because of the Cross, Jesus makes us one new family known as the church. The church becomes a new “temple” where God lives (Ephesians 2:22).

What does this Bible truth teach us today?

JESUS BRINGS US NEAR TO GOD (Ephesians 2:1–3)

Compare Ephesians 2:1–3 with Ephesians 2:11, 12. In these verses, Paul talks about the non-Jews and their past. What does Paul say about them?

Paul writes to non-Jews who are now Christians. They are believers in Jesus. They are part of Jesus' church. In the past, these same people were separated from Israel and from God's saving plan. Paul wants these new Christians to remember their past (Ephesians 2:11). In the past, the non-Jews lived without Jesus, the Savior. The non-Jews were foreigners or strangers. They were not part of Israel. They had no part in God's Agreement. They knew nothing about God's promises to save humans from sin. They had no hope and lived without God (Ephesians 2:12).

Also, in the past, these non-Jews fought each other and the Jews. These non-Jews were filled with hate. They said mean and nasty things about the Jews. The Jews said mean and nasty things about the non-Jews (Ephesians 2:11).

In Ephesians 2:13, Paul shows us that things have changed. Paul says to the non-Jewish Christians, "At one time you were far away, but now you have been brought near to God by the blood of Jesus Christ. Christ has made peace between us. He has brought both Jews and non-Jews together into one people" (Ephesians 2:13, 14, WE).

Do you see the words written as "far away"? Paul borrows these words from Isaiah 57:19, which says: " 'I will give peace to those who are near and to those who are far away. . . ' The LORD himself said this" (ERV; compare Ephesians 2:17, 18). Jesus brought the non-Jewish Christians close to God and to the Jewish Christians. How did Jesus make this miracle happen? The answer is by His death on the cross. The Cross ended the separation between Jews and non-Jews in the church. The Cross solved their problems and healed their hearts. This announcement is good news for us, today. Jesus wants us to think about everything that separates us from Him and from other people in the church. He wants us to trust that He can solve any problem we have.

What was your past experience before Jesus saved you? Why is it important to remember this experience often? If Jesus hadn't saved you, how would you be living your life now?



Jesus wants us to trust that He can solve any problem we have.

GOD'S GIFT FROM THE CROSS (Ephesians 2:14–16)

“Because of Christ [Jesus] we now have peace. Christ made both Jews and non-Jews one people. They were separated as if there were a wall between them. But Christ broke down that wall of hate by giving his own body. . . . And after Christ made the two groups to be one body [the church], he wanted to bring them back to God. Christ did this with his death on the cross” (Ephesians 2:14–16, ICB).

Read Ephesians 1:7, 8; Ephesians 4:32; Ephesians 2:13, 14; Ephesians 2:16; Ephesians 5:2, 25. In these verses, Paul says that the Cross makes our friendships better? How? How does the Cross help us to love people more?

In Ephesians 2:11–22, Paul says that the Cross does three things for Christians. (1) The Cross brings non-Jews close to God (Ephesians 2:13). In the past, non-Jews were far away in their hearts from God and His people. Now these non-Jews are sons and daughters of God. They also are brothers and sisters of the Jewish Christians (Ephesians 2:19). (2) The Cross removes the hate between Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians (Ephesians 2:16). The Cross ends the anger and war between these two groups (Ephesians 2:17). (3) The Cross helps bring peace and agreement in the church. Jesus had a plan to make the two groups one group. “After Christ [Jesus] made the two groups to be one body [the church], he wanted to bring them back to God. Christ did this with his death on the cross” (Ephesians 2:14–16, ICB; compare Colossians 1:19–22).

How does the Cross help God to accept us? How does the Cross help us to love and accept each other? Imagine in your mind a mother and a daughter arguing. Their disagreement causes them to stop talking to each other for a few years. Then they start talking to each other again. The mother and daughter forgive each other. They meet again after their long separation. This same thing happens when one church member is willing to stop being angry or upset at another church member. The forgiving church member sees the one who hurt him as his brother. This brother accepts the mercy and forgiveness from the one he hurt or upset. The Cross can heal our broken connections and friendships. The Cross destroys separation and ends fights. The Cross helps make possible again our fellowship with other Christians.



Imagine in your mind a mother and a daughter arguing. Their disagreement causes them to stop talking to each other for a few years.

BREAKING THE WALL THAT SEPARATES US (Ephesians 2:14, 15)

What does Paul say that Jesus did to “the law with its many commands and rules” (Ephesians 2:15, ERV)? Why did Jesus do this thing? (Read, also, Ephesians 2:14.)

Paul may be talking about the real wall with its warning sign that we read about earlier (review Sabbath’s study). Paul imagines this wall breaking so that non-Jews can worship God together with Jews (Ephesians 2:18). The Cross removes all walls between God’s people. Then Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians become one people.

Some people believe that Ephesians 2:14, 15 teaches that God threw out the Ten Commandments. But Paul shows us that this idea is false. Paul respects God’s law and believes that the law helps us understand how to follow Jesus. Paul talks about the law a lot. Paul talks about the 5th commandment (Ephesians 6:2, 3). He talks about the 7th commandment (Ephesians 5:3–14, 21–33), the 8th commandment (Ephesians 4:28), the 9th commandment (Ephesians 4:25), and the 10th commandment (Ephesians 5:5). So, we can see that Paul respects the law. Romans 3:31 and Romans 7:12, also, talk about Paul’s respect for the law. Would Paul talk about the law so much if God already threw it out? The problem isn’t the law. The problem is with people who use the law in the wrong way. But that doesn’t make the law wrong. We should not throw the law out just because people teach wrong things about the law. Paul honors the law and says its rules continue forever. So, people who say that Ephesians 2:14, 15 teaches that God ended the Ten Commandments don’t understand what Paul really is saying in Ephesians 2:14, 15.

Paul is against anyone trying to use the law to separate Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians. Separation is not God’s plan for His people. The word “law” in Ephesians 2:14, 15 means the rules about animal offerings in the Old Testament. The word “law” also may mean the whole worship plan that God gave Israel in Old Testament times. The Jewish leaders used this plan to cause separation between the Jews and the non-Jews.

What causes any separation between Seventh-day Adventists and other Christians in your community? How can your local church help stop this separation? Why should our love for Jesus help us solve this problem?



Paul imagines this wall breaking so that non-Jews can worship God together with Jews (Ephesians 2:18).

JESUS PREACHES ABOUT PEACE (Ephesians 2:17, 18)

What does Paul say about the special work that Jesus does? Read Ephesians 2:17, 18 for the answer.

Peace is an important idea in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The letter starts and ends with blessings of peace from God the Father and from Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 1:2; compare Ephesians 6:23). In Ephesians 2:11–22, Paul said that peace is a Person. That Person is Jesus. So, Jesus Himself is our peace! The Cross gives us peace (Ephesians 2:14–16). Because Jesus is peace, He destroys the hate between Jews and non-Jews (Ephesians 2:14, 15). Jesus also makes humans new. He makes our connections and friendships new, too, and fills them with peace (Ephesians 2:15–17). The peace that Jesus gives us means that we do more than stop fighting. Jesus' peace makes us whole and happy with God (Romans 5:1) and with other people.

What does Paul say about Christians sharing Jesus' message about peace? Read Ephesians 4:3; Ephesians 6:14, 15 for the answer; also, compare Romans 10:14, 15 with Ephesians 2:17–19; Isaiah 52:7; and Isaiah 57:19.



In Ephesians 2:11–22, Paul said that peace is a Person. That Person is Jesus.

The Gospels are the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Gospels show Jesus as a preacher for peace. In Jesus' final sermon to His followers, He promises them (and us) peace. "I leave you peace. My peace I give you" (John 14:27, ICB). Jesus ends His sermon with these words: "I have told you these things, so that you can have peace because of me. In this world [life] you will have trouble. But be encouraged! I have won the battle [fight] over [against] the world [everything that stands in the way of God's kingdom]" (John 16:33, NIV). After Jesus wakes up from the dead, He shows Himself to His followers. Again, He tells them, "Peace be with you!" (John 20:19, 21, 26, ERV).

In Ephesians 2:17, 18, Paul says that Jesus' message about peace was for Jews and non-Jews alike (compare Ephesians 2:11–13). When we accept this announcement about peace from Jesus, we will get a wonderful blessing.

How can we learn to preach about peace? How can we bring healing right now to the lives of people around us?

CHURCH IS THE SAME AS A HOLY TEMPLE (Ephesians 2:11–22)

What word pictures does Paul use in Ephesians 2:11–22? How do these word pictures show us the need for peace and agreement between Jews and non-Jews in the church?

As we already saw, Ephesians 2:1–10 teaches us that we live in peace and agreement with God because of Jesus. That's because Jesus' death helps God to accept us (Ephesians 2:1–10). Ephesians 2:11–22 teaches us that we may live in peace and agreement with other church members, too. Jesus' death also helps heal our friendships with other people (Ephesians 2:11–22). Jesus broke everything that separated His non-Jewish followers from His Jewish followers. After Jesus broke the walls that separated His people, He built a beautiful "temple": this temple is a word picture for Christians, or the church. Before Jesus died on the cross, non-Jews couldn't worship in the holy parts of the temple. But after Jesus woke up from the dead, His non-Jewish followers joined with His Jewish followers. Together, these two separate groups became a new temple. In the same way, Christians today become part of God's church (Ephesians 2:19–22). We live in agreement and peace with Jesus and our brothers and sisters who believe in Him.

In Ephesians 2:19–22, Paul uses the church as a word picture. Also, read 1 Corinthians 3:9–17; 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1; and 1 Peter 2:4–8. In these verses, what Bible truth does the word picture of the church show us?

Paul uses the word picture of the church to show us that non-Jews are part of God's church. As we said, the non-Jews weren't allowed to worship in the holy parts of the temple. Now these same non-Jews are accepted by God (Ephesians 2:18). These non-Jews also become the same as living bricks or stones that God uses to build His new temple on earth. This temple is a place where God lives by His Spirit in the hearts of His people (Ephesians 2:22). New Testament writers use the temple as a word picture to show us important Bible truth. God's church is holy. God is the One who starts and builds the church (Ephesians 2:22). God's followers in the church live in peace and agreement with each other. God's temple is living. So, it grows (read Ephesians 2:21).



Jesus' death also helps heal our friendships with other people (Ephesians 2:11–22).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Why does Paul write Ephesians 2:11–22? What is happening in the church at the time that Paul writes his letter?

In Ephesians 2:11–22, Paul talks about how the Cross changes human connections and friendships. Paul also talks about Jewish and non-Jewish Christians who are members of the church. Paul wants both groups of Christians to understand that they are all part of God’s family (Ephesians 2:19). Paul also talks about God’s plan to join everything together in peace and agreement under Jesus’ control (Ephesians 1:9, 10). Everything includes God’s family in heaven and His family on earth (Ephesians 3:15).

In Ephesians 3:10, Paul tells us another reason why God wants to join all church members together in peace and agreement. “His purpose [plan] was that all the rulers [leaders] and powers [the top angels] in the heavenly [in heaven] places will now know the many different ways he shows his wisdom. They will know this because of the church” (Ephesians 3:10, ERV). The church must show the peace and agreement that Jesus showed on the cross. When church members are at peace with each other, we show God’s plan for peace and agreement. So, we must read Ephesians 2:11–22 to learn important rules about how to get along with people who are different from us. Then we can help God with His wonderful plan to bring peace and agreement to the people on this earth.



When church members are at peace with each other, we show God’s plan for peace and agreement under Jesus’ control.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What Bible rules do you read about in Ephesians 2:11–22? What do these rules teach us about how we should get along with people who are different from us? How should members of one race group get along with members of a different race group? What rules does Jesus give us to help us to know the answer?
- ② We can read about God’s plan for the future of humans in Ephesians 1:9, 10 and Ephesians 2:11–22. How important is it for the church to solve its own race problems?
- ③ What race problems do you see in your community? How may the church help to solve these problems? What can you do to help?

PART 2: SAFE IN JESUS

16-year-old Almira decided to take a nap after school. Almira was tired from months of not getting enough sleep. So, she lay down on the couch. Her face was turned to the open door of the room. She was at home alone.

All of a sudden, Almira felt she was not alone. Almira looked at the door. She saw someone or something in the shape of a gray cloud standing in the doorway. Almira didn't know why, but she understood that something terrible would happen if she blinked her eyes. So, she stared at the doorway for a long time, without blinking. Finally, she had to blink her eyes. In that second, the gray cloud rushed at her. Almira felt as if she was buried in a grave and covered with giant stones. She felt helpless, and she couldn't move. Almira tried to breathe. She asked the good spirits for help. No one answered her.

At that instant, Almira remembered a prayer her parents taught her. Her parents were non-Christian. Almira said the prayer. For a moment, she was free and could breathe. But the spirit took her prisoner again. Almira said the prayer again and again. The spirit released her whenever she said the prayer, then grabbed her again when she stopped praying.

Almira grew so tired of fighting the spirit. She wondered what she could do to save herself. Just then, she remembered that one of the Russian teachers from the spirit classes said that Jesus Christ was more powerful than all good and evil spirits or magic. The thought came into her mind to ask Jesus for help. Almira opened her mouth to speak. She said only the first half of Jesus' name. As soon as she did, the gray cloud ran away. Almira knew that Jesus entered the room and threw the evil spirit off her.

Almira knew she needed Jesus. But how could she find Him? Almira wasn't a Christian. So, she went to her parents' place of worship for two months. Then she started to sleep better. Almira decided that Jesus must also visit that place of worship.

Then Almira's older sister, Faniya, came home with two friends that Almira never met before. Almira learned that Faniya started going to a Seventh-day Adventist Church near their apartment building. Faniya's two friends were members of the Adventist Church. Almira told her story to the two girls.

"That evil spirit is from Satan," one girl said.

The other girl said that Almira permitted Satan to enter her life when she started those classes. The girl said, "But Jesus is on your side. Only He can free you from Satan's power."

Read more about Almira next week. Thanks for your offerings that help share the Good News about Jesus in Russia and around the globe.

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Almira said only the first half of Jesus' name. As soon as she did, the gray cloud ran away.

