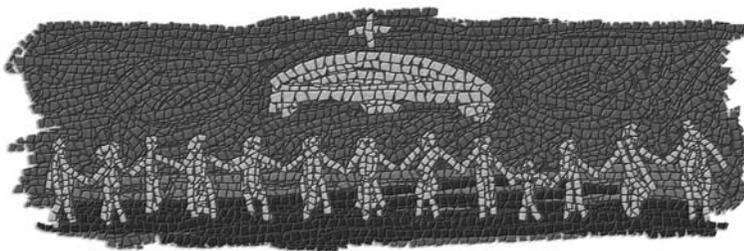


The Church Without Walls



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 3:20-31, 5:12-18, 2 Cor. 5:17-19, Eph. 2:11-22, Col. 1:20-22.*

Memory Text: “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (*Ephesians 2:14, NKJV*).

The impossible possibility: $1 + 1 = 1$. Impossible? Not so when it comes to the mathematics of the gospel of Christ. Paul’s forceful message this week is: What is impossible in human equation is possible under divine power and provision. Christ has created “in Himself one new man from the two” (*Eph. 2:15, NKJV*), and this He did only through His blood, shed on the cross in behalf of all humanity, Jews and Gentiles.

The transforming power of the Cross creates a new humanity in which “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (*Gal. 3:28, 29, NKJV*). The good news is that while differences may exist between persons, genders, cultures, races, and nations, the ultimate divine purpose is to bring all created order into one unity “in Christ” (*Eph. 1:10*). All these distinctions, though real, are superseded by the unity we have in Jesus.

The Week at a Glance: What was the position of Gentiles before they found Christ? What was the end purpose of God in making Israel His chosen people? How were the walls of separation between people torn down? What were the results of Christ’s ministry of reconciliation? In what sense are we God’s family and temple?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 5.

Outside of Christ: Alienation *(Eph. 2:11, 12)*

Having shown in the first part of Ephesians 2 that God’s grace has brought the free gift of salvation to individuals, the apostle, from verse 11, shifts his focus to what God has done to bring about reconciliation to hitherto divided communities.

In Ephesians 2:11, 12 Paul mentions four disabilities of the Gentiles who lived without Christ. Identify them:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Paul begins on a practical note. Name-calling is both unchristian and offensive. Jews called the Gentiles uncircumcised in a derogatory sense and called themselves circumcised in a sense of pride. Paul declares the futility of such name-calling by saying the circumcision of the Jews was, after all, “made in the flesh by hands” (Eph. 2:11, NKJV). Although circumcision had its spiritual significance at one time, now in Christ it is surpassed by the circumcision of the heart—a spiritual covenant available to both Jews and Gentiles alike.

In Romans Paul lists the privileges of the Jews *(Rom. 3:1, 2; 9:3-5)*. What were those privileges, and in light of what Paul said here about the state of the Gentiles, what responsibilities should have come with those privileges and advantages?

In contrast to the Jews, the Gentiles were excluded from the commonwealth of God. They had no part in the covenant of promise. They had no hope and, hence, no future. Worst of all, they had no true God, even though they had “many gods” and “many lords” (*1 Cor. 8:5, NKJV*). All they had was this world with its twisted philosophy, lurid pleasures, and pagan lifestyles. That was the plight of the Gentiles; in many ways this reflects the plight of all who live in the darkness of sin and separation from God.

Hostility between two groups is nothing new in history. While we may be quick to condemn the hostility between Jews and Gentiles as being unchristian, are there areas in which we exhibit such hostility? What can you or your local church do to elimi-

Key Text: *Ephesians 2:14*

Teachers Aims:

1. To stress that in saving us, Christ has also broken down barriers between human beings.
2. To warn against spiritual pride in the present-day church.
3. To encourage us to look beyond the very obvious differences among church members.

Lesson Outline:

I. All Are One in Christ Jesus (*Eph. 2:15*)

- A. Christ’s intention for the people He has saved is unity.
- B. Strife between individuals or groups is a result of sin.
- C. Only Christ can make it possible for unity to exist.

II. Saved to Serve (*Eph. 2:19-22*)

- A. The natural human tendency is to divide others into insiders and outsiders and to denigrate the latter.
- B. God wants all of us to be insiders.
- C. The only differences between insiders and outsiders in God’s scheme are grace and responsibility.

III. No More Walls (*Eph. 2:22*)

- A. In the church, God’s goal of unity has been, in a real sense, accomplished.
- B. We, as members of God’s church, are to accept this reality in our own lives and relationships.
- C. The unity of the church is a foretaste of God’s kingdom after the Second Coming.

Summary: While human beings may seem to have—and actually do have—different agendas and interests, the human condition is just that: human. We all are sinners in need of a Savior. God recognizes the essential unity of humanity and has brought humans of all kinds into His church. The true church will be one in which members are actively attempting to achieve unity.

COMMENTARY

Ephesians 2:11-22 presents a series of contrasts: “without Christ” and “in Christ” (*vss. 12, 13*), far and near (*vs. 13*), “enmity” and “peace” (*vs. 15*), “broken down” and built up (*vss. 14, 21*), “aliens” and “citizens” (*vss. 12, 19*), strangers without God and members of God’s household (*vss. 12, 19*). Jesus “abolished in his flesh . . . the law of commandments” (*vs. 15*). The Cross is, thus, God’s instrument of breaking down alienation, division, and sin’s curse; after breaking down, the Cross builds God’s household in which unity and oneness, reconciliation and peace, reign.

In Christ: Nearness *(Eph. 2:13)*

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” *(Eph. 2:13, NKJV)*.

“But now.” Two little words introduce a theme that changed the course of redemptive history. At one time the Gentiles were without Christ, outside God’s commonwealth, without the covenant of promise, without hope and God. “But now” heaven has intervened in the person of Christ to deal with the tragic and pathetic situation the Gentiles were in.

In choosing Israel, God “called them to preserve among men the knowledge of His law, and of the symbols and prophecies that pointed to the Saviour. He desired them to be as wells of salvation to the world. . . . They were to reveal God to men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 27. How does Israel’s call relate to us, as Adventists, today?

The words *far* and *near* describe the position of the Gentiles and the Jews. The rabbis proudly claimed that no nation is as near to God as Israel. That was true as part of God’s covenant with Israel; however, “nearness” was not to be understood as exclusiveness but, rather, as a communication privilege from which was to flow a witnessing duty to those who were “far”; that is, to the Gentiles. Israel failed in this duty. Isaiah predicted the day when the distance between “far” and “near” will disappear and peace will come to both *(Isa. 57:19)*.

To Paul, that Messianic day has come “by the blood of Christ” *(Eph. 2:13)*. One privilege the Jews held dear was that of being near to God’s temple and thus near to God’s mercy seat. The sacrificial blood played a crucial role in the temple rituals in the forgiveness of sins and keeping the Jews near God’s presence. The apostle moves from the blood of the animal to the blood of Christ, through which “a new and living way [has] opened for us” in order that we may “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” *(Heb. 10:20, 22, NIV)*.

In Christ, distance disappears. There is nearness, heavenly citizenship, promise, hope, and peace.

Ancient Israel believed it had been given special light and truth. And it had! Yet, look what spiritual pride had done to the nation. How do we as Adventists, who also believe we have been given special light and truth (and we have!), protect ourselves from this danger?

Although Paul is addressing primarily the division that plagued the Gentiles and the Jews of his time, his message is timeless and speaks to our world, torn apart by various forces of disunity and hatred. The lesson divides itself into three sections: “At that time” (*Eph. 2:12*); “But now” (*vs. 13*); “Now therefore” (*vs. 19*).

I. “At That Time” (*Eph. 2:11, 12*)

Paul’s writings reveal a profound sense of history and a commitment to Christology. Of this, we have here one great example. Paul begins his argument against disunity as rooted in history (“being in time past” and “at that time” [*vss. 11, 12*]) and theology (“without Christ” and “without God” [*vs. 12*]). The apostle recognizes the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, a wall that alienated and dehumanized two peoples. But God was not responsible for that wall. God’s choice of Israel rested not on their merits but on His sovereignty (*Deut. 7:6-9*). But the purpose of that choice was not Israel’s exclusivism but that they might be a light to all the world. “But the people of Israel lost sight of their high privileges as God’s representatives. They forgot God, and failed to fulfill their holy mission. . . . All their advantages they appropriated for their own glorification. They shut themselves away from the world. . . . They robbed God of the service He required of them, and they robbed their fellow-men of religious guidance and a holy example.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 14, 15.

Consequently, before Christ came, the Gentiles were (1) “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,” (2) “strangers from the covenants of promise,” (3) “having no hope,” and (4) without the knowledge of the true God (*Eph. 2:12*). How desperate the conditions of the Gentiles then, and, similarly, of people now who are outside Christ. Paul asks Gentiles then and us now: Remember the spiritual condition outside of Christ, and don’t ever become self-arrogant in your position of being in Christ and relate to other people groups in the same way the Jews did with the Gentiles.

II. “But Now” (*Eph. 2:13*)

If prior to Christ Gentiles were alienated from the citizenship of God’s kingdom (*vs. 12*), now that Christ has come, those who “were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace” (*vss. 13, 14*).

Paul’s insight is foundational to the understanding of the gospel. To speak of blood as a means of forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God may seem revolting in some theological circles. But according to the Bible, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” of sin (*Heb. 9:22, NIV*), and Christ “appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (*Heb. 9:26*).

Christ’s blood is God’s only way to deal with sin. Through His blood, Christ did away with the sacrificial system that had kept the

No More Walls *(Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:14, 15)*

The blood of Jesus has eliminated the distance between those who were afar and those who were near; that is, it eliminated the distance between Jew and Gentile (*Eph. 2:13*). How? Why? In what ways does Christ's shed blood show that we are all the same? See *Rom. 3:20-31, 5:12-18*.

From now on, Christ "Himself is our peace" (*Eph. 2:14, NKJV*). Christ—and no one else! As our peace, what did Christ do?

First, He "has broken down the middle wall of separation" (*vs. 14, NKJV*). The wall points to more than the temple wall that cut off the court of the Gentiles from other areas to which only Jews had access. It refers to religious, social, and political divisions that kept the two groups apart. But in dying for the sins of all humanity, Christ has brought peace in two dimensions: vertically, between God and humanity; horizontally, between person and person. The former proclaims that God loves all alike; the latter demands that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal. 3:28, NKJV*).

Second, Christ "abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances" (*Eph. 2:15, NKJV*). Though there's been a great debate over which law Paul is talking about here (moral or ceremonial), Paul's point is that through Christ anything that had divided Jews and Gentiles has been abolished in Jesus. All are now united in Him. Christ brought peace, and hence Paul says: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything" (*Gal. 6:15, NKJV*).

Third, Christ created "in Himself one new man from the two" (*Eph. 2:15, NKJV*). That is the gospel mathematics: $1 + 1 = 1$. The impossibility becomes possible. No more Jew, no more Gentile, but one new creation (*2 Cor. 5:17, NKJV*) in which people define their status not in terms of caste, color, gender, nationality, or tribe but in terms of an abiding relationship with the Christ of the Cross. "Jesus has succeeded in creating a new society, in fact a new humanity. . . . And this new human unity in Christ is the pledge and foretaste of that final unity under Christ's headship."—John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 93.

What prejudices might you be clinging to that go contrary to what we have been promised in Christ regarding the "new humanity"? How can you change?

Gentile away from the Jew and, thus, has “broken down the middle wall of partition between” the two (*Eph. 2:14*). Paul further states that Christ’s death had abolished “even the law of commandments” (*vs. 15*), which had caused the division between Jew and Gentile. What law is this? Not the Ten Commandments, for there is nothing in the moral law that divides humanity. Paul here refers to the ceremonial rituals, particularly the law of circumcision, that divided the Jew and the Gentile. The Cross abolished this law and tore down the wall of division. This redemptive activity of the Cross merges two persons to make one (*vs. 15*), for in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one” (*Gal. 3:28*). In Christ, reconciliation between God and human is complete, and peace reigns. The *afar off* have come *nigh*.

Distance disappears, and a new humanity of unity and peace emerges with open “access by one Spirit unto the Father” (*Eph. 2:18*). That is the precious legacy of the Jew and the Christian “now in Christ Jesus” (*vs. 13*).

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Romans 3:20-31, 5:12-18, Ephesians 2:11-22, Colossians 1:20-22*

❶ National and religious pride got in the way of the mission God had given to the ancient Hebrew nation. Such division and alienation are reflected in our world. What difference would a ministry of reconciliation make? (*2 Cor. 5:17-19*). What would you say to someone who expresses such doubts as “One person cannot make a difference?” How does Jesus exhibit the power of one person as an agent of change?

❷ When we are away from family and friends, we need to communicate or travel to maintain our connection with them. Being near indicates the possibility of fellowship or interaction. God wants us to have access to Him, so He brought us near “through the blood of Christ” (*Eph. 2:13, NIV*). What lengths do you go through to be near the ones you care about? Why does God want us to go to the same effort to reach those who are far from Him?

❸ What comes to mind when you hear someone say “Adventists are a movement of divine destiny”? What is the message we have been given to share? How can our election create a similar pride to that of the Jews? How do we avoid the pitfalls they experienced? How does the message of *Romans 3:20-31* compel us to share hope with others? How does your personal testimony of rescue from sin give a sense of urgency to your desire to save others from eternal loss?

Reconciliation and Access (2 Cor. 5:17-19, Eph. 2:16-18, Col. 1:20-22)

Read the verses listed above for today. Summarize the basic message found in them. How do you understand the reconciliation talked about in these verses?

What great privileges we have in Christ! Aliens are now citizens. The hopeless have received hope. Those without God have found Him. The walls of division are gone. A new creation of unity has emerged. Christ Himself has become our peace. In Ephesians 2:16-18 Paul expounds upon the reality and totality of what Christ has done.

First, peace is real because Christ has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles “to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (*vs. 16, NKJV*). Christ has reconciled what was irreconcilable—that is, the Jew and the Gentile. He did this, neither by impressing upon the Jews the need to accommodate the Gentiles nor by converting the Gentiles to the religious system of the Jews, which was by far superior to anything the Gentiles had. Christ accomplished the reconciliation of the Jew and the Gentile by dealing with a problem common to both—the problem of sin, which is the cause of all enmity. The Cross reconciled both Jew and Gentile with God, and that reconciliation became the basis of their unity in “one body,” which is the church without walls.

Second, the totality of the peace is underscored by the apostle in verse 18: “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (*NKJV*). The entire Godhead—Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—is involved in this process of reconciliation and peace, both vertically with God and horizontally between people. But that’s not all. Both Jews and Gentiles have one common *access* to God through one Spirit. There can be no more walls separating Jews and Gentiles in either worship or fellowship.

The word *access* in Greek usage pictures someone being presented to the king in his throne room. Through Christ, both Gentiles and Jews—indeed, all believers—have common access to the very presence of God. Both the one who was an alien and far away and the one who was near and a citizen are ushered into the throne room of God by the same Spirit. Thus, peace and reconciliation in Christ is total and real.

Though the context here is Jew and Gentile, it could really be between any number of different groups, regardless of what divides them. What barriers stand in the way of fully realizing this ideal, and what can be done to remove them?

III. “Now Therefore” (*Eph. 2:19-22*)

“So then,” says the New American Standard Bible, because of the oneness the Cross has accomplished between people, and between God and sinners, no one is a foreigner in the kingdom of God, but all are “fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (*vs. 19*). The Christ of the Cross has established the house of God, the family of God, the church of God, to which access and entry are wide open. This household was nourished and built by the “apostles and prophets,” Jesus “himself being the chief corner stone” (*Eph. 2:20*).

What a divine transformation the Cross has brought about: from sin to righteousness, from alienation to fellowship, from far off to

Witnessing

Suppose that after living next door to you for more than twenty years, your neighbor announces he is arranging to have an eight-foot high, solid-board privacy fence installed around his property. His actions will cut off your view of the meadow and the stream gurgling through it. Two weeks later, the fence is in place, the view from your backyard is limited, and your relationship with your neighbor has deteriorated. You ask yourself over and over, under what possible circumstances can barriers and partitions improve, rather than tear down, relationships?

Seventh-day Adventists embrace the truth that God’s world-wide family of believers are one in His name and purpose. While geographical location may physically separate His people, the unifying thread that weaves and binds all together is God’s message of love and redemption.

Sharing with nonbelievers our full acceptance of this universal theme of oneness in Christ takes precedence over race, nationality, gender, or any other “barrier” that serves to highlight our differences rather than our similarities. Unity in Christ eliminates the need, or desire, to define others by the color of their skin, the way they dress, the language they speak, the country they call home, or their gender. Where someone is *from* is far less important than where she or he is *heading!*

Determine to make every effort this week, next week, and every week that follows to demonstrate clearly to others through your personal behavior that “Blest be the tie that binds / Our hearts in Christian love! The fellowship of kindred minds / Is like to that above. / We share our mutual woes, / Our mutual burdens bear, / And often for each other flows / The sympathizing tear. / When we asunder part, / It gives us inward pain; / But we shall still be joined in heart, / And hope to meet again.”—“Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” *The Church Hymnal* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), no. 350.

“The Household of God” (*Eph. 2:19-22*)

From tragedy to joy. From alienation to fellowship. From Gentiles and Jews to one new humanity. The saving work of Christ has accomplished all this, and now the apostle introduces the believers to their new status. Ephesians 2:19-22 lists three attributes of that standing.

First, citizenship. Outside of Christ, Gentiles were strangers and foreigners and had no share in the “commonwealth of Israel” (*Eph. 2:12*). But in Christ they become “fellow citizens with the saints” (*vs. 19, NKJV*). The Christian is a citizen of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God has two aspects. The kingdom of grace is in operation now as people repent of their sin and accept the salvation offered by Christ. The kingdom of glory will be established when Christ comes the second time to gather His saints home. Without being citizens of the first, we cannot be citizens of the second.

What are the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship? If our citizenship is in heaven, what does God expect of us here? Find verses to defend your answer.

Second, membership in God’s household. A Christian is not only a citizen but a member of God’s family. The word *family* evokes a relationship of closeness, equality, and dignity. Parents and children are not distant and empty shadows but share a warm and intimate relationship in which love reigns supreme. They have an obligation to one another, and together to the family; likewise, in God’s family, which is the church.

The church, says Paul, is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (*Eph. 2:20, NKJV*). Surely, the man who affirmed that Christ is the only foundation (*1 Cor. 3:11*) cannot reverse himself here in suggesting a human foundation. Christ as the Cornerstone (*cf. 1 Pet. 2:6*) holds together the various parts of the house, giving strength and unity to it.

If the church is like a family, how should the members treat each other? Find verses anywhere in Scripture to support your answer.

Third, we are God’s temple. The union of all believers in God and the unity between alienated groups serves the end purpose of being God’s holy sanctuary, “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (*Eph. 2:22, NKJV*). A church without walls becomes God’s holy temple (*1 Cor. 3:16*).

Write out a paragraph that envisions the ideal “church without walls.” What would that be like? How closely does your local church embody this great principle?

nearness, to unity of God’s household. All for what purpose? Paul’s exaltation knows no bounds: In Christ, we who are broken, bent, misshaped and born out of season, perfectly fit together to make the “holy temple in the Lord” a “habitation of God through the Spirit” (*Eph. 2:21, 22*).

The journey of grace and faith is complete: “By grace are ye saved through faith” (*vs. 8*). Those who were dead in sin (*vs. 1*) and those who gloated in their being chosen but turned unfaithful—both the Gentile and the Jew—are brought together in Christ to complete the temple of God!

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: When we travel outside our country of origin, we recognize we are foreigners. We carry a different passport, perhaps wear different styles of clothing, and even speak a different language. Describe a trip you may have taken to another country. Through the blood of Christ Jesus, we are “no longer foreigners and aliens” (*Eph. 2:19, NIV*) of the heavenly kingdom. What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven even while we live on this earth? How did this transformation take place?

Thought Question:

As the Donner party began their immigration to the West Coast of North America, their hopes ran high. However, the winter of 1846 trapped them in the Sierra Nevada mountain range, where most of them died. How is this like our situation as sinners? Discuss the good news that Christ is “our peace” who has “destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (*Eph. 2:14, NIV*). How does your church model unity and inclusiveness?

Application Question:

December 25 is fast approaching. Many people in our world are planning to give gifts to friends and loved ones. How is the environment that grants the gift of grace different from the holiday environment? Contrast our utter unworthiness to receive a gift from God with His willingness to grant it. Reread Romans 5:12-18 several times. Ask class members to share which concepts in these verses touch them personally, and why. How can we be God’s hearts and hands to continue His type of gift giving in our world? In a season of prayer with your Sabbath School class, ask God to impress each member with a specific mission of mercy to perform this week.

Further Study: *Prejudice and disunity.* “The same agencies that barred men away from Christ eighteen hundred years ago are at work today. The spirit which built up the partition wall between Jew and Gentile is still active. Pride and prejudice have built strong walls of separation between different classes of men. Christ and His mission have been misrepresented, and multitudes feel that they are virtually shut away from the ministry of the gospel. But let them not feel that they are shut away from Christ. There are no barriers which man or Satan can erect but that faith can penetrate. . . .

“Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character. In His sight the souls of all men are of equal value. . . . Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 403.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ “Therefore remember . . .” says Ephesians 2:11 (NKJV). Why does Paul want us to remember our past condition? Cf. Deut. 15:15, 16:12, 32:7. Have those who are willing talk about what Christ has spared them from and the great changes He has wrought in their lives. Though it’s not good to dwell on the past too much, why is it good to remember what we have come out of?
- ❷ Mahatma Gandhi once observed that as long as Christians practice caste, Hindus have no need to worry about getting converted. How have Christians been guilty of practicing the caste system? What does this say about racism’s effect on religion? In what ways has racism impacted even our own church?
- ❸ Peace with God and peace with one another form the basis of Christian life and relationship. There’s only one problem: A great deal of division and disunity exists within the Christian church itself. How can you explain this discrepancy and what can be done to help heal it?
- ❹ There will, of course, in heaven be none of the kind of hateful divisions we have here on earth. What does this tell us about how important it is for us to work at getting rid of such divisions now?