

# Living with New Eyes

## *St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*

### Study 5 | Ephesians 2:11-22

#### *"The World Reconciled"*

Immediately after Paul spends significant time explicating and arguing for the absolute sovereign, unmerited, and completely gracious nature of salvation in Christ, he writes the word, "Therefore." Everything we will read and study this week proceeds from an understanding of what has come before. In other words, to grasp and work toward the unity and reconciliation available in and necessitated by Jesus we must first understand the graciousness of our salvation and the powerful rule of Jesus over all things and all people for the sake of his church. And so we turn to Ephesians 2:11-22.

#### **1. How does Paul describe the state of Gentile Christians before they came to faith in Christ? How does he describe the state of Jewish Christians before they came to faith in Christ?**

Paul describes the state of Gentiles "in the flesh"—that is, according to natural descent and before becoming Christians--as a people "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" (v. 12). He later calls them those who were "far off," and "strangers and aliens." This means that before Jesus came, the non-Israelite was a stranger to the true God, his Messiah ("Christ"), his covenant relationship to his people along with its concomitant promises; as such they were those without hope and without a true God in the world.

Paul describes the Israelites before Christ as those with all the above-mentioned privileges unavailable to the Gentiles (i.e. having the covenants of promise, awaiting the fulfillment of promises of a messiah, having God and hope). They were those who were "near" to God and citizens of God's commonwealth and members of the household of God. Of course, these privileges were true of Israelites before the coming of Christ, during his earthly ministry, and throughout the transitional epoch during the 1<sup>st</sup> Century during which time Israel *qua* Israel still existed in some form. After the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 these privileges would not remain in the same state, as Christ's initial and foundational work of making one new man out of the two was complete.

#### **2. What was the hostility or division between Jew and Gentile outside of Christ? What did Christ do to reconcile the two groups in himself?**

This is the part of the discussion that gets complicated. On the one hand, the unique privileges and distinctions (such as circumcision) given to Israel by

God in the Old Testament were given to distinguish them from the rest of humanity. They were to be his unique, chosen people; this distinction was to create a longing, even jealousy, in other peoples so that they might turn to God and experience his benefits as well. So there is an inherent, if not sinful, division between Israelites and non-Israelites before Christ. However, Israelites at the time of the New Testament had forgotten the chief purpose of their distinction: to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. See Genesis 12:1-3. They were not to hold their unique giftings with pride or hostility toward others, but rather were to bless others with these gifts. Instead, they had by and large mastered the easy art of discriminating against others because of their unique religious heritage and taking pride in their gifts. The resulting hostility is evident all over the pages of the New Testament and is especially clear in Jesus' various encounters with the Pharisees.

There were at least three aspects to Jesus' work of reconciliation that Paul mentions in this passage. 1) He preached peace to those who were far off (Gentiles) and to those who were near (Jews). Thus, everyone needed to hear the call to peace in the midst of their varying contributions to mutual hostility. 2) He abolished the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, namely, the whole economy under the Torah. No longer did food laws, purity laws, circumcision, temple and tabernacle, etc., count for anything in Christ; the once God-given world under the Torah had been done away with in the new world Jesus was creating. There was to be no further division in this new epoch. 3) He began building a new temple as a dwelling place for the Spirit, made up of the living stones from Israel and from the Nations ("Gentiles"). Their new lineage and culture and unification was to be Christ as cornerstone and the testimony and teachings of the Apostles and Prophets, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

**3. How does Paul describe the new humanity in Christ? What hostilities are there between your own culture and that of others? What work of reconciliation needs to be done by Jesus in your life? What resources has God given in Jesus to reconcile all the people of the world to God and to one another in Christ?**

Paul describes the new humanity in verses 19-22. Think of the glorious descriptions in these verses. What if this was your chief identity, and the chief identity of all those who name the name of Christ?! How could this help us overcome traditional cultural and ethnic divisions? What are some current cultural divisions and hostilities with which you are familiar and maybe even culpable. Think globally and locally. What work needs to be done in our hearts and our communities?