

## The Two Made One

The shower is where?" asked Tamyra.

"Westwood," replied Khianna.

"You mean, 'Whitewood,'" quipped Lashawn.

"I am not going out there with all of those white people," said Tamyra. "You can go if you want to."

"Like they want us out there," added Lashawn. "They don't want to see any Black people."

"She invited us," said Khianna.

"She invited the office," said Tamyra. "She doesn't expect us to come."

"She asked me specifically, and said she hoped we would come."

"Oh 'we,' huh?" Lashawn said dryly.

"She" was forty-seven-year-old Bethany Gallagher, who was getting married for the second time. She lived in the posh municipality of Westwood. It was about forty miles from where Khianna, Tamyra and Lashawn lived and about million cultural constructs away.

"Bethany has been nothing but kind to me," said Khianna.

"That's just her office face," said Tamyra. "She probably doesn't have one Black friend."

Khianna sat in the car and prayed before going into the shower. She was apprehensive. Though she had been the only Black person in the room more times than she could count, she was weary of it. Still, she had come.

"Help me, Lord," she prayed. "Help me show the love of Christ."

**1. Have there been situations where you have felt uncomfortable because of your race? What did you do?**

**2. Why do you think breaking down barriers between people is important to God?**

**3. Is unity a purely future goal, or can we have it now?**

## A New Identity and Unity

*Ephesians 2:11–16 KJV*

11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; 16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.

*Ephesians 2:11–16 NIV*

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, 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)—<sup>12</sup> remember 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. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by 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, <sup>16</sup> and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Paul begins by reminding the Gentiles of who they are in Christ and urging them to embrace that new identity. Building on this shared identity and purpose in Jesus, he acknowledges the racial and cultural tensions that had

defined the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.

Paul contrasts the Gentiles' identity before and after the coming of Christ. Before Christ, Gentiles were "separate," "excluded," "without hope," "without God," and "far away" (vv. 12–13). They had no part in God's covenant with Israel and all the benefits that came with it. But now, they have been "brought near by the blood of Christ" (v. 13). To the Gentiles, this new pathway is good news.

Paul explains that Jesus "is our peace." He "destroyed . . . the dividing wall of hostility" and "[set] aside in his flesh the law" (vv. 14–15). Paul is letting the Jews and Gentiles know that their new identity in Jesus transforms their relationships with God and with one another. The law had regulated these relationships in the past, but requirements like male circumcision are no reason to keep Jews and Gentiles separate, in light of what God has done.

Jews of this period had grown accustomed to carefully regulating access to God, as God Himself had requested they do. These kinds of laws had served a good purpose, but they also become a barrier for outsiders to come to Israel. Paul says the need for any barrier is over, that Christ's work is one of reconciliation.

Paul emphasizes this theme by shifting from second to first person in verse 14 ("he himself is our peace"). He is including Jews and Gentiles in that statement. Jews and Gentiles are on equal footing before God, since all people have the same need for salvation.

In verse 15, Paul spells out Christ's mission to bring unity. His purpose was "to create in himself one new humanity out of the two." As Paul describes it, this unity happens when groups are reconciled, first to God—through the cross—and second to one another—in the diverse community. Unity with one another will be the fruit of embracing a new life in Christ, where hostility is "put to death" (v. 16).

**4.** *What words are used to describe the Gentiles before Christ?*

**5.** *How do the Gentiles' lives after receiving Christ contrast with their previous lives?*

**6.** *How does the work of Christ impact the relationships we can have with one another?*

## **A Holy Community**

*Ephesians 2:17–22 KJV*

17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. 18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

*Ephesians 2:17–22 NIV*

<sup>17</sup> He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

<sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

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

The Gentiles have a new identity, and now Paul describes how that identity impacts their place in the Christian community. Paul's message is one of unity as he describes Jesus' work, preaching "peace" to those who were "far away and peace to those who were near" (v. 17). The language here, as well as in verse 13, alludes to Isaiah 57:19 which says, "Peace, peace to those far and near." Paul seems to interpret those two words as two categories

of people: Jews (“near” to God as inheritors of the covenant promises) and Gentiles (“far away” from God before the inclusion by faith). Paul grounds his teachings in the anticipation of a Messiah for all nations.

After alluding to the universal nature of Christ’s work, Paul says that through Jesus “we [Jews and Gentiles] both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (v. 18). Instead of emphasizing distinctions, Paul focuses on similarities. Jews and Gentiles depend on the work of Christ, and Jews and Gentiles access the Father by receiving the same Spirit.

Even though God has welcomed Jews and Gentiles, this does not erase all relevant differences. Paul reiterates his encouragement to Gentiles to leave behind any former designations, to embrace their new identity as “citizens with God’s people and also members of his household” (v. 19). The household means the family of God, which believers join as adoptive siblings to Jesus (see Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 4:4–7).

Paul then uses the image of a building—first a house and then called a “temple” (v. 21). Construction is built “on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” with Jesus as the “chief cornerstone” (v. 20). The physical structure is “joined together” (v. 20).

Paul preaches good news through a message of radical inclusivity. The temple of the first century was full of divisions and separations to shield God’s presence from anything ritually unclean. But Paul addresses Jews and Gentiles, even those who were unable to come near to God in the physical temple. Now, the combined people of God are themselves a new temple and home for God.

**7.** *From this text, what are the results of the work of Christ?*

**8.** *What comes to mind when you hear the term “temple”?*

**9.** *What can we learn about Christian community from Paul’s words here?*

## I'll Separate You!

When I was little, my cousins and I loved going to my grandmother's house for sleepovers. At bedtime, we'd cram into the back bedroom of her tiny house, tucked in but not at all ready to go to sleep. Soon, we'd start making one another giggle with silly stories and jokes until the noise carried to my grandmother's listening ears and she'd call out with a stern voice, "You kids get to sleep, or I will separate you!" The threat of separation seemed the worst of all possible punishments, and it was usually enough to get us to quiet down. Yet, the very next day we could easily erupt into an argument. In those times, we wanted nothing more than to get as far away from one another as possible.

What changed? During the day we had a lot to argue over—taking turns, agreeing to what games we were going to play or who gets to have the last cookie. But at night, when all was calm and quiet, there was much less to fight about. That was when we would remember how much we loved being together!

The Jews and the Gentiles were learning to come together to live as a family. They had a lot they could fight about. Coming from very different backgrounds, each had a different understanding of what it meant to be faithful. Jews struggled to embrace Gentiles who didn't follow the Jewish laws and practices. Gentiles were entering a new way of life, without the shared memory of living as God's people. Paul says to put aside what you thought you knew; you are all family now! He shifts their focus from what divides to what they could welcome in one another.

**10.** *When was the last time you worked with someone you struggled to get along with?*

**11.** *What fears do you imagine the Jews and Gentiles had about coming together?*

**12.** *How does an identity in Christ give us peace to embrace those who are different?*

## Welcoming Others in Christ

If God was able to make one community of faith from Jews and Gentiles, what boundaries would He encourage you to erase today? Is there a particular person or kind of person—someone very different from yourself—whom you struggle to welcome as a brother or sister in Christ?

► *I think especially about \_\_\_\_\_.  
I commit to welcoming people who are unlike me, who might have a different background.*

► *If God provides an opportunity for me to overcome a barrier that separates those in Christ, this is how I will respond:*

### KEY VERSES

In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. —Ephesians 2:21–22 KJV

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

—Ephesians 2:21–22 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 18 through August 24

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Joel 2:12–17—Return to the Lord.

**Tues.** James 2:14–26—Faith without Works Is Dead.

**Wed.** Psalm 146—Everlasting Reign.

**Thurs.** Psalms 149–150—A New Song

**Fri.** Luke 11:1–13—Teach Us to Pray.

**Sat.** Hebrews 13:1–8—Practice Deeds of Mutual Love.

**Sun.** Hebrews 13:9–21—Offer Sacrifices of Praise.