

Ephesians Reading Guide

If you had the opportunity to offer words of encouragement and challenge, a divestment of wisdom, to a group friends and family, what would you say? More to the point, if you could take by the hand your brothers and sisters in Christ and show them what it means to grow as a Christ follower, how would you do so? Perhaps you would remind them of the very foundations of their identity in Christ, pointing them toward their indissoluble hope in Christ and the grace that is theirs because the God of the universe set his love upon them before they took their very first breath. Perhaps you would invite them to remember that a part of their new, resurrection life in Christ is to be inextricably bound to other believers, living with humble selflessness that reflects the very heart of Jesus. Perhaps you would exhort them to realize that this new resurrection life will produce in them holiness and love and an existence that speaks of their place as citizens of the *now and one day* Kingdom of God. Perhaps you would extol them to filter all of their relationships through the lens of their own gospel transformation. Perhaps you would warn them of the fact that their allegiance to Christ brings real, spiritual opposition, and preparation for battle looks like a maturing faith and an ever-growing intimacy with the Lord.

The Apostle Paul spent nearly three years investing in the Church at Ephesus, and his letter to the group of churches in and around the city is filled with these exhortations, challenges, reminders, and more. In what is his most general letter to any church, Paul offers a robust exposition of the resurrection life that is now to be the lived experience of these Christian men and women.

Despite the general nature of the letter, Paul isn't writing into a cultural vacuum. These are believers who daily feel the tension of living new lives in Christ in the midst of real opposition in the form of false gods, lustful hedonism, idolatrous worship of the state, and the various and sundry everyday challenges of living in one of the largest and most influential metropolitan centers of the entire Mediterranean world. And when we think of Paul's letter to the Ephesians in those terms, it's easy to see a resemblance with our world today. We would do well to humbly sit under the wisdom offered in these six chapters, ingesting each encouragement and challenge and reminder in turn, and live together as a people whose identity is defined by our union with the resurrected Christ.

Ephesians is not a command to white knuckle our way into a new kind of behavior. It isn't some campfire singalong call to a cheap sense of camaraderie. It's an invitation to believe that God's redemptive work in our lives changes us completely, it binds us together, and it produces a new existence in us that speaks of hope and joy and humility and love that resemble the life of our Savior. Ephesians is a call to believe God when he says that we are new in Christ and, from that believing, live differently, ever in step with the Spirit. And this resurrection life touches everything about us.

May we be enthralled with the mystery of the gospel. May we see the glorious vision of a gospel-transformed community of faith living with Christ-exalting, others-serving humility. May we be a resurrection people in a dying world.

Ephesians 2:11-22

Overview

In this passage, Paul picks up where he left off in 2:1-10, now referring to the Gentile believers as bound together with believing Jews to form a single, spiritual building. Paul is emphasizing the same-ness, if you will, of the reconciling work of God in Christ that has taken place in both groups. In the midst of tremendous diversity, Jesus himself serves as *peace*, the Cornerstone around and upon whom the whole of this building is situated.

We don't have to look far to realize that division is far more prevalent than unity in our world, and what God does in the lives of believers is revolutionary. In a divisive, angry, and hectic world, Christians are a people of peace. How? Why? Because we recognize that we have been undeservedly reconciled to God. Because we have the Spirit of God dwelling in our midst, reminding us that the things that enrage so many are but a vapor held against the backdrop of eternity.

Do we emanate joyful peace in Christ, or do we bear an anti-gospel sense of enmity, competition, or bitterness? Are we willing to listen to those with whom we disagree on different matters because we realize that the diversity represented in our body is actually a testimony to the unifying work of God in Christ, and the peace that he brings, rather than a tear in a fabric that needs to be patched? We are knit together in Christ into something new and beautiful. This isn't some idealistic vision for what the Church could be. Ephesians 2:11-22 is a mirror that serves to show us what we are and how we, as Christians, should live.

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands — 12 remember that you were at that time 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. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:11-22

Supplemental Passages

Isaiah 57:14-21

This passage in Isaiah, in particular verse 19, stands as the backdrop for Paul's language here in Ephesians 2:11-22. While Isaiah was speaking of the reconciling work of God to draw the scattered Jews to himself, Paul adopts this language to refer to God's integration of both Jews and Gentiles into his family.

John 16:25-33

Paul, in Ephesians 2:14, refers to Christ as "our peace," specifically in the reconciling work accomplished through his death and resurrection. In John 16, Jesus anticipates this when speaking to his disciples, describing his overcoming of the world and pointing toward the peace that he brings. We can know peace as Christians not because life is easy or because the things that divide us magically dissipate. Rather, our peace is founded on the reconciling work of God in Christ that overcomes the division that is so characteristic of the culture around us.

Suggested Songs

"Cornerstone" by Hillsong
"All I Have is Christ" by Sovereign Grace
"His Mercy is More" by Matt Boswell and Matt Papa
"For All That You Have Done" by Rend Collective

Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) Take a moment and read all of Ephesians 2. What are some of the similarities between 2:11-22 and 2:1-10? What are some differences?
- 2) Paul speaks of being reconciled to God AND experiencing peace with one another in Christ. What do you think Paul means when he talks of **peace** here? Why was this so significant for Jews and Gentiles in Paul's time?
- 3) How does this vertical peace (reconciliation with God) define our horizontal peace (with one another)? Does peace with God and others define your life? Why or why not?
- 4) Make note of the role of the Spirit in these verses. How does Paul describe the activity of the Spirit here? How does the Spirit operate in your life to bring peace and unity?
- 5) In what ways are you allowing the divisiveness or busyness of the world to rob you of peace? What daily rhythms might help you experience the peace of Christ that is found in our right relationship with God and others?