

# Explore the Bible: Reconciled

September 3, 2019

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Sept. 22 focuses on Ephesians 2:11-22.*

We were created for relationship. Even before the fall, God identified something about man's standing that was not good—that he should be alone (Genesis 2:18). Genesis 2 deals with how God filled this need by creating a partner to come along side man. Genesis 3, however, tells us that we created an even bigger void in our being when we rebelled against God and became separated from him.

Since then, humanity has been searching to fill that void. Sometimes we try to do this through human connections. Dozens of apps are available today whose sole purpose is to help people connect to each other. And yet, we seem more lost and disconnected than ever. Sometimes we try other means to help us. Pascal argued that this search exists because the void can only be filled by the one who originally occupied it in the first place—God.

In Ephesians 2:1-22, the Apostle Paul explains to the church how God has worked to bring humanity into relationship with him through the work of Jesus. He tells how believers have been moved from being enemies of God to family members. He shows us how the void that exists in every person has been filled for those who come to Christ.

## **Brought Near (Ephesians 2:11-13)**

Throughout the letter, Paul has been talking about how things used to be (formerly) and how they are presently (now) for those who are in Christ. He brings that together with the only imperative in all of chapters 1-3, “remember.” Like other uses of the term in the Bible, remembering doesn't

mean to “call to mind,” but rather is a charge to act on that which has long existed.

Paul points out the contrasts that once existed for Gentiles, both as individuals and in relation to the greater body of Christ. He lists five ways in which they were once distant: they had no relation to Christ, they were not among the people of God, they had no claim to the covenant and its promises, they had no hope and they had a void where God should have been.

The status of believers before coming to Christ now has been changed, however. The blood of Christ, applied to man by the grace of God, has brought very near those who previously lived far off. The vicarious atonement of Christ—in which he suffered a violent fatal penalty for the sin we committed and in so doing, connected us to the Father—is taught in many places, but nowhere more clearly than it is here.

*In what ways might we “remember” the transformation we have experienced through Christ as called for by Paul in this passage?*

## **Peace Declared (Ephesians 2:14-18)**

Paul highlights the implications of salvation for the corporate identity of believers in this section by shifting between first person references in verses 14 and 18 and second person references in verse 17. This movement from “us” and “ours” to “you” and then back again conveys the notion of unity found in Christ. Not only unity between Jew and Gentile which is explicit in the text, but unity with God. This unity is present because “Christ is our peace.”

Paul uses several images to relate what he means by peace—unity, access, reconciliation and removal of barriers. Although peace here (and throughout Paul’s writings) carries with it the idea of cessation of

hostilities between God and man, it also carries with it a note of wholeness and security.

This new status is at the heart of the concept of reconciliation that is Paul's focus at the center of these verses. The verb to "reconcile" is rare for Paul and absent from the rest of the New Testament. Some have even argued that Paul himself coined the term. The concept is that of two parties, formerly at war and distant from one another, now enjoying unfettered access to each other. This access is more than just proximity, however. The idea expresses a union of sorts that is both thorough and unbreakable.

*When someone says to you "go in peace," what thoughts come to your mind about what they are saying? How might this apply to God's granting of peace as described by Paul in this passage?*

## **Citizenship Granted (Ephesians 2:19-22)**

Paul describes our present status in Christ as being part of God's household. Paul uses a lot of word play with the Greek word for "house" in this passage to drive home his point of our new status. He talks about how Gentiles are no longer aliens (outside the house), but are now members of the household (house dwellers), built on a sure foundation (constructed like the floor of a house), and a building (house) that is built together (brought together like a house). This word play is to illustrate both the connection of the work accomplished and the purpose. That is, we are now all part of the same household and have, therefore, become the dwelling place of God on earth. All of this is built on Christ, who is the cornerstone and core of these relationships.

*What are the challenges of viewing ourselves as the "house of God?" What are some implications of the fact that Paul uses the image of us as a*

*corporate temple, rather than individual temples in this context?*

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