

The Church Without Walls¹



SABBATH—OCTOBER 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Romans 3:20-31; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Ephesians 2:11-22; Ephesians 5:12-18; Colossians 1:20-22.

MEMORY VERSE: “Christ himself is our peace. He has made Jews and non-Jews into one group of people. He has destroyed the hatred [hate] that was like a wall between us” (Ephesians 2:14, NlrV).

IT IS NOT TRUE THAT $1 + 1 = 1$. But $1 + 1$ does equal 1 when it comes to the gospel of Christ. Paul's message this week is: What is impossible among humans is possible under God's power and care. Christ has created in Himself “one new group of people out of the two [groups]” (Ephesians 2:15, NlrV). Christ did this through His blood flowing from the cross for both Jews and Gentiles.

The transforming² power of the Cross creates new people. “There is no Jew or Greek. There is no slave or free person. There is no male or female. Because you belong to Christ Jesus, you are all one” (Galatians 3:28, 29, NlrV). There may be differences between persons, sexes, cultures, races, and nations. But God's greatest purpose is to bring all people into one unity “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). The unity we have in Christ surpasses all differences people may have.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What was the position of Gentiles before they found Christ? Why did God make Israel His chosen people? How were the walls of separation between people torn down? What were the results of Christ's work in bringing people back to God? How are we God's family and temple?

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

¹without walls—having no prejudice nor hate to separate people into groups. Prejudice is hating people because of their skin color, religion, or sex.

²transforming—changing into something completely different. The power of the Cross completely changes our lives.

SUNDAY—OCTOBER 30**OUTSIDE OF CHRIST: SEPARATION (Ephesians 2:11, 12).**

The first part of Ephesians 2 shows us that God's grace has brought the gift of salvation to each person. Beginning with Ephesians 2:11, Paul starts to talk about what God has done to bring together divided communities (groups).

What four problems did Gentiles have without Christ? Ephesians 2:11, 12.

God commanded that Jewish males should be circumcised³ (Genesis 17). Circumcision was a sign that the Jews belonged to God. So when the Jews called the Gentiles uncircumcised, the Jews were insulting the Gentiles. But Paul says that such insults were useless because Jews were circumcised only "in their bodies by human hands" (Ephesians 2:11, NIV). Circumcision had its spiritual value at one time. But it has no spiritual value now, because in Christ, the circumcision of the heart has replaced circumcision of the flesh. Circumcision of the heart is now a spiritual agreement between God and His people for both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul lists the rights of the Jews in Romans 3:1, 2 and Romans 9:3-**5. What were those rights? What responsibilities should have come with those rights for Gentiles?**

The Gentiles were not counted among God's people. They had no part in the covenant (agreement) of promise. They had no hope, and no future. Worst of all, they had no true God. They did have "many gods" and "many lords," but that was nothing (1 Corinthians 8:5, NIV). All the Gentiles had was this world with its false philosophy, worldly pleasures, and harmful lifestyles. In many ways, this shows the sad condition of all people who live separated from God.

Bitterness between two groups of people is nothing new. We may be quick to criticize the bitterness between Jews and Gentiles as being un-Christian. But, are there areas where we show bitterness? What can you or your local church do to remove bitterness between differing groups in your town?

MONDAY—OCTOBER 31**IN CHRIST: NEARNESS (Ephesians 2:13).**

Read Ephesians 2:13. At one time, the Gentiles were without Christ. They were not God's people. They were without the covenant (agree-

³circumcised—having the foreskin cut off the sexual part of a male. In the spiritual sense, the Jews thought of themselves as God's people, and the Gentiles were not.

ment) of promise. They were without hope. But now Heaven has acted through Christ to deal with the sad situation the Gentiles were in.

God “called the Israelites (Jews) to protect the knowledge of His law, and the prophecies pointing to the Savior. God wanted the Israelites to be as wells of salvation to the world. . . . They were to show God to all people.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 27. How are Adventists to show God to all people?



The rabbis⁴ proudly claimed that no nation was as near to God as Israel. That was true as part of God’s covenant with Israel. But being near to God did not mean they were within a special group of people. Instead, being near to God meant they were to communicate with Him so they could

share Him with other people who were far from Him. But Israel failed to share God with the Gentiles. Isaiah said that people who were far from God and people who were near to God would one day both find peace in Him (Isaiah 57:19).

Paul says that the day of the Messiah has come “by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13). One right the Jews held dear was being close to God’s temple. In this way, they were close to God’s mercy seat.⁵ Blood played an important part in the system of sacrifices. Blood was related to the forgiveness of sins and to keeping the Jews near to God. But Paul moves from animal blood to Christ’s blood. Through Christ’s blood, “a new and living way [has] opened for us” (Hebrews 10:20, NIV). In that way, we may “come near to God with an honest and true heart. Let us come near with a faith that is sure and strong” (Hebrews 10:22, NIV).

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

Old-time Israel believed God had given them special truth. And He had! But see what spiritual pride did to Israel. We Adventists believe God has given us special truth. How can we protect ourselves from being spiritually proud?

⁴rabbis—Jewish teachers.

⁵mercy seat—the lid of the ark of the covenant. The ark was in the Most Holy Room of the temple. The Ten Commandment tablets were inside the ark. The mercy seat was solid gold and had two angels looking down at the ark. The mercy seat represented God’s mercy (kindness we do not deserve).



We need to communicate with God so we can share Him with others.

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 1

NO MORE WALLS (Ephesians 2:14, 15; Galatians 6:15).

Jesus' blood has removed the distance between people who were far from God and people who were near to Him. His blood removed the distance between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:13). How does Christ's blood show we are all the same? (Romans 3:20-31; Romans 5:12-18).

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

1. He "has broken down the middle wall of separation" (Ephesians 2:14, NKJV). This wall is not just the temple wall that cut off the Gentiles from the rest of the temple. Only Jews could enter other areas of the temple. The wall also means religious, social, and political divisions (separations) that kept Jews and Gentiles apart. But Jesus died for the sins of all people. In this way, Christ has brought peace in two ways: (1) between God and people and (2) between people and people. The first way shows that God loves people equally. The second way shows that in Christ "there is no Jew or Greek. There is no slave or free person. There is no male or female. Because you belong to Christ Jesus, you are all one" (Galatians 3:28, NIV).

2. Through the Cross, "Christ put an end to the law with all its commands and rules" (Ephesians 2:15, NIV). There has been a lot of talk over which law Paul is talking about in Ephesians 2:15. Is he talking about the moral law⁶ or the ceremonial law?⁷ Paul's point is that Christ has put an end to anything dividing Jews and Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles are now united in Him. Christ brought peace. So Paul says: "[In Christ] circumcision and uncircumcision don't [do not] mean anything" (Galatians 6:15, NIV).

3. Christ "wanted to create one new group of people out of the two

⁶moral law—the Ten Commandments.

⁷ceremonial law—the laws for the sanctuary sacrifices and temple sacrifices which pointed to Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

[groups]” (Ephesians 2:15, NIV). That is gospel mathematics: $1+1=1$. One group plus one group equals one group! No more Jew, no more Gentile. But one new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17, NKJV). In this new creation, people decide their position by their continuing relationship with Christ. “Jesus has succeeded in creating a new society of new people. . . . And this new human unity in Christ is the promise of that final unity in the new kingdom with Christ as Head.” —Adapted from John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 93.

What prejudices might you have that keep you from being part of Christ’s new creation? How can you get rid of those prejudices?



There are no more walls because of Jesus’ Cross.

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 2

RECONCILIATION⁸ AND ACCESS⁹ (2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Ephesians 2:16-18; Colossians 1:20-22).

Read the verses listed after the title of today’s lesson. Summarize their basic message. How do you understand the reconciliation these verses are talking about?

What great honors and rights we have in Christ! Strangers are now citizens. Hopeless people have received hope. People without God have found Him. The walls of division (separation) are gone. A new creation of unity has come forth. Christ Himself has become our peace. In Ephesians 2:16-18, Paul preaches about the work Christ has done.

1. Peace is real because Christ has brought together both Jews and Gentiles “as one body back to God because of the cross. Christ put their hatred [hate] to death on that cross” (Ephesians 2:16, NIV). Christ has brought together what would never be brought together before—the Jews and the Gentiles. Christ did not bring them together by telling the Jews to accept the Gentiles. He did not tell the Jews to convert the Gentiles to the Jewish religion. Christ brought the Jews and Gentiles together by dealing with a problem they both had. This problem was sin. Sin causes all the hate in the world. The Cross brought

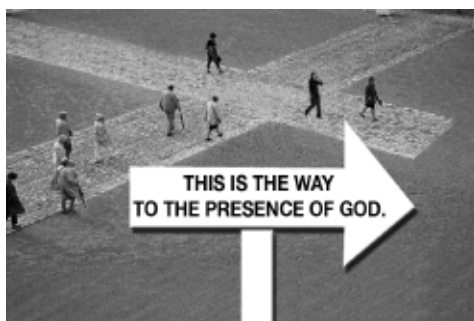
⁸reconciliation—being brought back to God.

⁹access—being able to go to God.

together both Jews and Gentiles with God. The Cross brought them together as one group in Christ. This is the church without walls.

2. Paul points out how complete the peace is in Ephesians 2:18. “Through Christ we both come to the Father by the power of one Holy Spirit” (NIRV). The entire Godhead (Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit) is involved in this process of reunion and peace with God and between people. But that is not all. Both Jews and Gentiles have one common avenue (way) to God through one Holy Spirit. There can be no more walls separating Jews and Gentiles in church worship or fellowship.

The word “access” in the Greek language gives us a picture of someone being introduced to the king in his throne room. Through Christ, both Gentiles and Jews (and all believers) have common access to the very presence of God. Both the person who is a far-off stranger and the person who is near are invited into God’s throne room by the same Holy Spirit. So, peace and reunion in Christ is total and real.



In Ephesians 2 and 5, Paul is talking about bringing together Jews and Gentiles. But his words are good for any groups of people who do not get along. What prevents you (or the church) from getting along with certain groups of people? What can be done to bring you (or the church) and these groups together?

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 3

“THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

From tragedy¹⁰ to joy. From alienation (separation) to fellowship. From Gentiles and Jews to one new group. The saving work of Christ has done all this. And now Paul introduces the believers to their new position in life. Ephesians 2:19-22 lists three characteristics¹¹ of that position.

1. *Citizenship.* Outside of Christ, Gentiles were strangers and foreigners. They were not “citizens of Israel” (Ephesians 2:12, NIRV). But in Christ, they become “fellow citizens with the saints” (Ephesians 2:19, NKJV). The Christian is a citizen of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God has two parts: (1) The kingdom of grace is on earth now as people repent¹² of their sin and accept Christ’s salvation. (2) The kingdom of glory will be established

¹⁰tragedy—something terrible that has happened.

¹¹characteristics—what the character is made of, such as patience, kindness, hope, or laziness and anger, etc.

¹²repent—to say you are sorry for your sins and then to turn away from your sins.

when Christ returns to bring His saints home. Without being citizens of the kingdom of grace, we cannot be citizens of the kingdom of glory.

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

2. Membership in God's household.

A Christian is a member of God's family. The word "family" brings to mind closeness, equality, and honor. Parents and children are not far-off and empty shadows. Instead, they share a warm relationship in an atmosphere of love. They have a responsibility to one another, and to the family. It is the same way with God's family. God's family is the church.

Paul says that the church is "a building that is built on the apostles¹³ and prophets. They are the foundation. Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone in the building" (Ephesians 2:20, NIV). As the most important stone (1 Peter 2:6), Christ holds together the different parts of the church. This gives the church strength and unity.

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

3. *We are God's temple.* The union of all believers in God and the unity between separated groups serves the purpose (goal) of God's holy sanctuary. The goal is that the sanctuary is "a dwelling [living] place of God in the [Holy] Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22, NKJV). A church without walls becomes God's holy temple (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Write a paragraph that pictures the ideal church without walls. What would that be like? How closely does your local church follow the truth of a church without walls?

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 4

ADDITIONAL STUDY: *Prejudice and disunity:* "The same forces that kept people away from Christ eighteen hundred years ago are at work today. The hate which built up the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile is still active. Pride and prejudice have built strong walls of separation between different classes (groups) of people. Christ and His mission have been misinterpreted. Many people feel that they are shut away from the gospel. But do not let them feel they are shut away from Christ. There are no blocks which people or Satan can build but that faith can go through." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 403.

¹³apostles—the disciples of Jesus whom He chose to preach the gospel after He returned to heaven.

“In Jesus’ eyes, the souls of all people are of equal value. . . . Without any thought of age, rank, nationality, or religious standing, all people are invited to come unto Him (Jesus) and live.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 403.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. “Therefore remember . . .” says Ephesians 2:11 (NKJV). Why does Paul want us to remember our past condition? Read also Deuteronomy 15:15; Deuteronomy 16:12; Deuteronomy 32:7. Have class members talk about how Christ has saved them. Encourage them to discuss the great changes He has done in their lives. It is not good to think about the past too much. But why is it good to remember what we were before we became believers?
2. Mahatma Gandhi, a famous martyr¹⁴ of India, once said that because Christians practice caste¹⁵ (class system), Hindus do not need to worry about getting converted. How have Christians been guilty of practicing the caste system? What does this say about racism’s¹⁶ influence on religion? In what ways has racism influenced the Adventist Church?
3. Peace with God and peace with one another is the basis of the Christian life. But there is only one problem: There is a lot of separation and disunity within the Christian church itself. How can you explain this problem? What can be done to solve the problem?
4. Why is it so important for us to work at getting rid of the hateful separations we have on earth?

¹⁴martyr—a person who is killed because of her or his religious beliefs.

¹⁵caste—a social system of different classes of people arranged by birth, culture, language, religion, and wealth. People are born into the caste of their parents.

¹⁶racism—feelings of prejudice against people whose skin is a different color or whose culture is different.