

Discussion Guide: Unity of the Body of Christ

Let us examine the Scriptures like the Bereans who "received the message with the great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."
Acts 17:11 (NIV)

August 17, 2003: "Unity of the Body of Christ" by Pastor Joe Godwin who is in transition between churches and seeking God's leading into another fellowship of believers. The present organic unity of Christ's Body, the Church, was established by believers' first becoming reconciled to God. From Ephesians 2:11-22, Joe pointed out two principles that impact our relationship to God and each other.

- A. Man's alienation from God is the basic cause of mankind's hostility to others (2:11-12). Further, God chose the hostility between Jews and Gentiles as an example of how alienation from God negatively affects our relationship to others. Formerly, the Ephesians led lives characterized by disobedience and sin (2:1-3) and were foreigners who were "excluded from citizenship in Israel" and as such had no part in the covenants and were without hope and without God.
- B. Reconciliation to God positively affects our relationship to others, (2:13-22). What was formerly said of the Ephesians was no longer true because they had been brought near in Christ and the law with its commandments and regulations that had acted like a wall dividing Gentiles from Jews had been broken down (2:14-15). The result of God's redemptive activity in Christ is the union of Jew and Gentile into one body, brought about not by the Gentiles becoming Jews but by the creation of a "new man," the Church, that includes both Jew and Gentile (See Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, and Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians*, NIBC).

Joe gave two striking illustrations of foreign believers who were outwardly different from American Christians but were identical in their hearts. One concerned his first church in Rio Grand, Ohio, where many foreign students visited the congregation and some became believers as a result. The other referred to Joe's visit to the African nation of Chad where the believers were socially, culturally and economically different from him but their inward spirit was identical to his spiritual nature.

Discussion and Application Questions

As you begin your discussion pray for the Holy Spirit to illumine the hearts and minds of you and your flock and to unite you to one another and to God as you study and apply God's Word. Then, open your Bibles and read together Ephesians 2:11-22.

Begin with several content related questions to stimulate your Group to recall points from the sermon.

1. What are some of the causes of hostilities between different people groups around the world. How do these causes impact racial prejudices and social, educational and economic bias.
2. Discuss how basically all people have much more in common than they have differences (i.e., common ancestry with Adam & Eve, 98.6% common DNA

sequence, etc.). This being so, why is there yet so much hostility between nations and between different peoples within nations?

Continuing the Group Discussion

Return the focus on applying Ephesians 2:11-22 with the following questions.

1. The unity of believers is based upon their common salvation: salvation from spiritual death (2:1-3) and salvation unto spiritual life (2:4-10). Discuss how this common salvation can break down social, cultural, and economic “walls” between those who become believers (2:14).
2. Discuss how you feel knowing that “you who were once far away have been brought near [to God and to His people] through the blood of Christ,” (2:13).
3. “For through Him we both have access [a way of approach] to the Father by one Spirit,” (2:18). Discuss how this might relate to your salvation, prayer, and fellowship with God.
4. Now that “you are no longer a foreigner and alien, but a fellow citizen with God’s people and a member of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone,” (2:19-20), discuss your feeling of security given by the salvation which God bestowed upon you in Christ Jesus.
5. Since you are one in whom “God lives by His Spirit.” (2:22),
 - a. Are you usually conscious of this truth as you go about your daily life?
 - b. What effect does/should this have on your relationships with God and others?

Helping your Flock Members Apply and Act

1. Do you know of anyone who needs to be restored to fellowship with another? Can you help bring this about?
2. Scripture strongly implies that reconciliation to your Christian brother or sister takes priority over worship (read Matthew 5:23-24). Is there someone to whom you need to go and make things right: a relative, friend, spouse, or neighbor? Can you, and will you, do so?
3. Do you need to, and if so, will you begin today to practice restitution and reconciliation (i.e., in your own home with your spouse and children, in your neighborhood, with fellow workers on the job, with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, etc.)?
4. The Bible also speaks of making restitution of things previously stolen, borrowed and not returned, or promised but not paid (Exodus 22:1). Do you have any need to make restitution? If so, you may want to get counsel from mature believers before you act on this.