



Scotts Hill Baptist Church

LIVING IN FREEDOM • PETER OR PAUL • GALATIANS 2:1-10; EPHESIANS 2:11-22 •

MAIN POINT

The gospel unites diverse believers around the glory of God and the advance of His kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some groups or places in which you have a strong sense of community? (Ex: alma mater, favorite team, town, family, clubs or civic organizations, etc.) What is it about those groups that makes it so easy for people to connect?

Do you think it's easier or more difficult for people to connect in a church than it is to connect in other groups? Why?

If a non-Christian asked you what the point of the church is, how would you respond?

Many social groups seem to be more cohesive than the church at times. For example, it seems like sports fans often have closer bonds and more shared interests related to their teams than Christians have related to their shared mission. Today we are going to look at the need for unity in the church and discuss what we can do about it.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 2:1-10.

What issues had caused a lack of unity for the people in Galatia? How did Paul and Titus experience this division?

Who had Paul consulted regarding his ministry to Gentiles? Why do you think Paul included the apostles when dealing with the unity of the church?

How would you explain Paul's goal in this situation?

How would you summarize Paul's approach? How is this different from how you might react in a similar situation?

Paul spoke to the division over Jews and Gentiles by talking about his experiences. He knew that tension existed, but he was not worried about the issue because he had spoken with the apostles, the leaders of the church in order to reach a wise conclusion. Paul knew his purpose was to spread the gospel, not to worry about circumcision. He dealt with divisions about circumcision again in Ephesians 2, once again focusing on the unity of the gospel.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 2:11-22.

Before Jesus came, what problems did the Gentiles face (vv. 11-12)? How do those images compare to your personal history?

Paul reminded his Gentile readers that they had been hopeless and godless before their salvation. Or, as he put it in this verse, Gentiles had been far away from God, which characterizes all of our lives before salvation. When we remind ourselves of this truth, it makes God's gift of salvation all the more incredible.

How do you think the practicing Jews felt when these Gentiles started coming to their church, but didn't want to adopt the Jewish customs? What customs might draw that reaction from us today?

According to verses 14-18, what are the positive results of this wall coming down? Which one is the most significant to you and why?

The subject of Paul's message in verses 11-18 is that through His death Jesus "tore down the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14) between believing Jews and Gentiles, causing them to be at peace with one another as one new people of God. This happened because when Christ came, He proclaimed the good news of peace to those who were far away and peace to those who were near. As a result, unity (v. 14) and peace (v. 16) are possible in our relationships with others, and we all have access to the Holy Spirit's power (v. 18).

In what ways can you see God's earthly church being fitted together and growing in the Lord? How is this evident specifically at our church?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Why is it important to remember what we were before God's power changed us? How can you do this in a healthy way?

Where does division and tension show up in your life? How can the gospel bring freedom and unity in that area?

What divisions have you seen among Christians in our community or even at our church? Why are divisions dangerous for the health of the church?

What are some of the unique challenges we face as we practice biblical unity? How can we tangibly combat those challenges?

PRAYER

Close in prayer asking that God would bring unity to our church and the churches around us. Pray that the church would focus on the gospel and not preferences or backgrounds that may bring division. Pray that your group would continue to grow closer and more united in purpose. Thank God for sending Christ who broke down the dividing walls that can form in the church.

COMMENTARY

| GALATIANS 2:1-10

2:1. This reference to 14 years could be to a full 14 calendar years or 12 full years and fractions of the first and last. The time could look back to: (1) Paul's conversion (1:15-16), (2) Paul's previous trip to Jerusalem (1:18-19), or (3) Paul's trip to Syria and Cilicia (1:21). Paul's relationship with Barnabas, whose name means "Son of Encouragement" (Ac 4:36), began in Jerusalem (Ac 9:27). Titus was a convert under Paul (Titus 1:4) who became an effective minister (2Co 2:13; 7:13; Titus 1:5).

2:2. Paul "presented... the gospel" he was preaching to the leaders (at least James, Peter, and John; see note at v. 9) for the sake of helpful discussion. The phrase "might not be

running... in vain" reflects concern over brewing disunity in the church. Paul's meeting privately with the leaders (lit "the recognized ones") in Jerusalem makes it unlikely he was talking about the Jerusalem Council, which was larger and more public (Ac 15:6,12).

2:3. To make it clear that he had not adjusted his gospel message during this private conference with the church leadership in Jerusalem, Paul used Titus as a test case. Had Paul caved in to the view that had recently been preached in the Galatian churches (that it was necessary for a Gentile to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law to become a Christian; 2:16; 5:2-3), Titus, a Gentile convert, would have been compelled to be circumcised, but he was not, reflecting the fact that Paul's gospel was accepted by the recognized church leaders in Jerusalem.

2:4. "False brothers" reflects that they were not really Christians. This group heard that Paul was having private discussions about the gospel and the Gentiles, and they found a deceptive way to "crash the party" to try to curtail "freedom... in Christ" and enslave Christians to the law, which was happening in the Galatian churches (5:1).

2:5. To maintain the truth of the gospel, Paul did not submit even momentarily to their argument about circumcision.

2:6. James, Peter, and John were the recognized "pillars" of the church (v. 9). "What they really were... God does not show favoritism" was not meant as disparaging to them. However, as Paul recounted in verses 11-14, he encountered problems in Syrian Antioch from: (1) those who were claiming authority from James (v. 12), and (2) Peter's hypocritical attempt to appease that group.

2:7-8. Paul was not saying in these verses that there are two different gospel messages. Rather, he had been appointed by God as the apostle to the Gentiles (Ac 22:21; Rm 11:13), and Peter served as an apostle to the Jews. God was at work in each ministry.

2:9. The unity of viewpoint between Paul and the leaders of the Jerusalem church was symbolized by the "right hand of fellowship"—a common sign of friendship and agreement.

2:10. "To remember the poor" was the main reason why Paul and Barnabas had made this trip to Jerusalem (Ac 11:28-30).

| EPHESIANS 2:11-22

2:11. Paul asked those who were Gentiles to review what their lives had been like at one time, that is, before their salvation. The alienation between Jews and Gentiles was based on observable differences in the flesh of both groups. For example, Jewish males had been marked by the religious ritual of circumcision. This rite symbolized that they belonged to the covenant family. Gentile males had no such mark.

2:12. The terrible Gentile condition extended beyond racial discrimination. They had been deprived of the spiritual blessings that Jews had enjoyed for centuries.

2:13. Paul had starkly reminded his Gentile readers that they had been hopeless and godless before their salvation. Or, as he put it in this verse, Gentiles had been far away from God. The words But now mark a transition. Because through faith Gentiles now are in Christ, the past deprivation is gone. They have now been brought near. Paul explained the means by which this happened: the blood of the Messiah. Only by the atoning death of the Jewish Messiah could Gentiles (or Jews, for that matter) come into a right and near relationship with God.

2:14. "Hostility" characterized the natural relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul taught that peace (cessation of hostility, harmonious friendship) summarizes the supernatural relationship between these groups, brought about because He (the Messiah) removed the barriers between them. Through His death Jesus made both groups one. Where there had been two hostile parties—Jews and Gentiles—there was now a third possibility, the body of Christ.

2:15. The main issue separating Jew and Gentile was the law of the commandments in regulations. Now that Jesus has come, the shadows have vanished in His light. He has now created one new man—a new humanity—from the two old groups, Jews and Gentiles.

2:16. Not only did Jews and Gentiles need to be reconciled to each other, but members of both groups—sinners all—needed to come into right relationship with God. Thus, Jesus died also so that He might reconcile both groups to God. He did this by dying for them in one body, the church (5:25).

2:17. Jesus' death did not automatically unite all Jews and all Gentiles into one body; neither did it automatically reconcile all persons to God. Yet His death was essential. Paul now turned to another essential ingredient to the gospel—its proclamation. Both Jews and Gentiles needed to hear the message of reconciliation and respond to it.

2:18. The death of Jesus is the only means by which we both—Jews and Gentiles— have access to God. Although Jews had been near, they did not think of themselves as having intimate access to God. The entire sacrificial system reminded them of their sins and the unapproachable holiness of God. Now all believers can come to God intimately, as our Father.

2:19. The you language throughout this passage refers to those born as Gentiles. Such believers are no longer what they were. The word foreigners was a reminder of their previous deprivation as those “excluded from the citizenship of Israel” (2:12). The term “strangers” was a reminder that Gentiles had no knowledge of “the covenants of the promise” (2:12). By contrast, in the new humanity Jews and Gentiles together are fellow citizens with one another in the kingdom of God.

2:20. The architectural language compares the new humanity to a magnificent temple under construction. The foundation for this divine building is the apostles and prophets. Jesus’ designated representatives were the apostles, whose preaching and writings are foundational to the church. The term “prophets” refers to inspired men who proclaimed the Word of God alongside the apostles. Churches today stand only when they depend on the foundational truths God revealed to the apostles and prophets, now preserved in the Scriptures.

2:21. Individual believers are compared to the stones being added to the whole building. The words “holy sanctuary” (traditionally, temple) imply this building was set apart for God’s use. The Ephesians were well acquainted with the unholy temples in their city. They knew well that the whole idea of a temple was to serve as a house or dwelling place for a god. (Acts 19:23-34).

2:22. Paul’s return to “you” language reminded his readers again that they had been included in God’s plan. They were being built together with Jewish Christians to become God’s dwelling place on earth. It wasn’t the stone-and-gold temple in Jerusalem but instead God’s new people the church in which the Spirit was present. God’s new humanity, scattered around the world but meeting in local congregations, is His home.