



**OASIS: HOPE FOR RACIAL HARMONY
DONE IN SYNC WITH
THE “EN CHRISTO” SERMON JOURNEY**
The Passage – Ephesians 2:11-22

Preface: Welcome to our fourth LC Bible study in our new sermon series “En Christo.” These LC studies will complement the sermons, often using the same biblical texts, and will help your LC go deeper in personal understanding and application. These italicized portions are meant to resource and help you in leading.

Leader Notes: The first 3 chapters of Ephesians are theologically dense but beautiful passages. You are encouraged to take your time in these studies and limit the number of questions in favor of creating thoughtful discussions while keeping the big ideas in mind.

Study’s BIG Idea: At one point, we have all been far from God but because of Jesus, we can **all** be near.

Opening Question/Transition:

(During Oasis, the suggestion was raised that for groups who either know each other very well or have spent too much time in conversation before the study to skip the opening questions and “jump right in the text.” I thought it was a helpful piece of feedback to pass along.)

Ephesians 2:11-22 (NIV © 2011)

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands) – ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

O – What feelings do you experience after reading verses 11-12? Or, to ask it another way, if you were only to read verses 11-12, what assumptions could you make of Paul and the Christian faith?

I – In verse 12, Paul piles on the ways in which Gentiles are apart from God:

1. Remember that you were separate from Christ.
2. Excluded from citizenship.
3. Foreigners to the covenant of promise.
4. Without hope and without God in the world.

Describe how we can see the Old Testament perspective being overtaken by the New Testament perspective because of the work of Jesus.

(An example would be: Israel, citizenship, and circumcision are redefined into spiritual relationships, identities, and realities because of the Resurrection.)

A – Picture yourself as a newly converted Gentile believer living in Ephesus 2000 years ago. Imagine aloud how this newfound life in Christ would feel. How do you imagine it would change your perspectives on the Jewish population? What about those who still reject Jesus as the Messiah? How would this alter your perspective on all ethnicities and change your understanding of national/spiritual identity?

O – Compare the beginnings of these respective sections: Eph. 2:1-5 and Eph. 2:11-13. What similarities do you find? Any differences?

(Paul begins both these passages in the negative. Vv. 1-5 begin by saying that you were the spiritual walking dead while vv. 11-13 articulate that the Gentile has no identity in God. One significant difference would be that vv. 1-5 are broader and inclusive of everyone being spiritually dead while vv. 11-13 address Gentiles specifically.)

I – The parenthetical statement implies that circumcised Jews are actually no better than the uncircumcised Gentiles in the eyes of God. What statements is Paul making here? (Remember, he is a Jewish rabbi).

(Paul, though proud of his Jewish heritage, circumcised on the 8th day [Phil. 3:5], grateful for Israel, is attempting not to “talk down” but to “talk across” to his Gentile audience in further making his case that all of humanity is in need of redemption.)

A – Consider today, what might modern Christians use as non-spiritual gauges in place of “circumcision,” being an Israelite, or citizenship?

(Church affiliation, gender, background, vocation, doctrinal belief, political bent, social behavior, ethnicity...)

O – What phrase does Paul repeat in vs. 13 & vs. 17?

I – Paul is quoting Isaiah 57:19 – “You who once were far away...” which refers to the Jews in exile and uses Jerusalem as the metaphor of salvation. What do you see Paul doing with this metaphor here in these verses?

(Paul is expanding the far away as spiritual exiles who are apart from Jerusalem, i.e., salvation.)

A – In applying the metaphor to us, who do we see around us who are “far” and need to discover the meaning of being near in Christ? How do you help bring others near?

O – Verses 19-22 are among the most theologically inclusive in the Scriptures. What strikes you as the most personally welcoming?

A – Paul is making it clear that Christianity is not an “insider religion.” How should this shape us as we profess the hope of Jesus beyond our walls?

A – At the same time, Paul is putting Jews and Gentiles on the same plane as fellow citizens. Identify the goodness that can result today in the Kingdom of Jesus if all racial, ethnic and social barriers were removed.

Key: O – Observation. I - Interpretation. A – Application

- a. **Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single night.** Take some time and select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your LIFE Community group. Certain questions work better for certain groups. You are encouraged to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best.
- b. Complement OIA questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- e. Application: Pace the study to conclude with “difference making” application.
- f. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching,” rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.