

# THROUGH JESUS...

We receive unity, *Ephesians 2:11-22*

Luke's gospel opens with an extended narrative announcing Jesus' birth and its significance. His description includes the familiar scene of angels praising God for the privilege of delivering "good news of great joy,"<sup>1</sup> the birth announcement "of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (*Luke 2:9-14*). While many people today know that story because of its connection to the Christmas season, Luke presents it as the triumphant conclusion to the Hebrew Bible's focus on God's promise to bless the world through Abraham and his descendants (*cf. Genesis 12:1-3*).

The apostle Paul, a contemporary of Luke, also wrote about the "good news" connected to Jesus. For example, Paul opens his letter to the Christians in Ephesus by praising God for the spiritual blessings He gives through Jesus. The phrase "in him" repeats throughout Paul's letter, emphasizing Jesus' position as the one through whom God extends His love-motivated blessings (*Ephesians 1:3-10*). This lesson continues a series exploring the things Paul wrote to the Ephesians that God gives through Jesus. By developing our understanding of what God does through Jesus, we will deepen our appreciation of Jesus' birth, extending it beyond the Christmas holiday to encompass every day of our lives. In this lesson, we will consider the following:

## *God gives us unity through Jesus.*

### "In him...God unites us together"

**God unites divided people through Jesus** (*Ephesians 2:11-13*).

- In his opening comments to the Ephesian Christians, Paul wrote that God commissioned Jesus "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (*Ephesians 1:10*).
- One of the clearest expressions of the unity Jesus establishes exists among Christians who enjoy a unity like the one experienced by God and Jesus (*John 17:20-23*).
- However, that unity did not exist before Jesus. Paul wrote that non-Jewish people **were** "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel" and, consequently, the promises and hope that God offered to the Israelites as part of His covenant with them (*Ephesians 2:11-12*).
- **But now**, Paul continued, God unites Jews and Gentiles by using Jesus to break down "the dividing wall of hostility" separating them (*Ephesians 2:13-14, cf. Genesis 12:1-3*).
- The unity God creates through Jesus does not merely broker a 'ceasefire' between the two hostile groups but instead forms them into "one" united community (*Ephesians 2:12-14*).

---

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:3. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



### God unites people through Jesus by forming them into a new humanity (*Ephesians 2:14-15*).

- God intended the unity that defines His identity also to define humanity (*cf. Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25; Matthew 19:1-9; John 17:20-23*). The divisions segregating people in our world exist because of sin's corrupting presence rather than God's design (*cf. Genesis 11:1-9; Matthew 19:1-9*).
- Jesus' mission "to unite all things" includes a surprising solution to the division caused by human sin – he forms Christians into a new humanity (*Ephesians 2:15*).
  - Paul drew on God's creation of man in Genesis 1-2 when he wrote that Jesus "create[s] in himself one new man" (*Ephesians 2:15*).
  - Christians become "new creation" people through baptism, their symbolic death and resurrection that allows them to share Jesus' identity (*Galatians 3:26-28; 6:15; Ephesians 2:1-2, 4-5*).
  - The identity God gives Christians through Jesus establishes unity by separating them from their "old self" and its divisive sin (*Ephesians 4:17-24*).

God's goal of uniting "all things" in Jesus reaches beyond our relationships with one another; His purpose includes uniting "all things in heaven and things on earth" (*Ephesians 1:10*).

Consequently, **God also creates unity between Himself and Christians through Jesus** (*Ephesians 2:14-22*).

- In uniting people through Jesus, God also gives them "access in one Spirit to" Him (*Ephesians 2:14-15*).
- The access God provides establishes a relationship that Paul illustrates in two ways.
  - The access He provides enables Christians to become "members of the household of God" (*Ephesians 2:19*).
  - In addition to making them part of His family, the access God provides makes Christians a new temple in which He dwells (*Ephesians 2:19-22*).

## Applications

- We must not diminish unity's importance – it is Jesus' 'deathbed request' for His followers (*John 17:20-23*)
- However, **our unity exists in Jesus** rather than in our personal preferences or the tolerance advocated by our culture (*cf. Galatians 3:26-28*).
- Because our unity originates in what God does for us through Jesus, it expresses itself by mirroring the relationship between God and Jesus – it expresses itself through love (*John 17:20-26; 13:1-16, 34-35; Philippians 2:8*).

Let us rejoice over the unity God has given us through Jesus and pray that God will help us practice the Jesus-shaped love that defines our unity.

