



Week 4

United in Christ

Memory Verse:

*... you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,
Ephesians 2:19 (NIV)*

PERSONAL STUDY

Read Ephesians 2:11-3:13

OPENING REMARKS:

God's work of reconciliation is not only between God and the individual, though it must begin there. It is also between groups of people that are at odds, such as Jews and Gentiles were in the days of Paul.

The Gentiles who came to faith were extremely aware of the enormous differences that existed between them and the Jewish Christians. They did not belong to the covenant people, Israel, and they were called the "uncircumcised", which for the Israelites was an indication that they could never meet the requirements for the ceremonial laws. They were seen as unclean, and they were far from God and without hope.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, they became one with Christ and were reconciled to God. Christ now makes the difference and the differences between Jew and Gentile have been removed. They still remain from diverse backgrounds, but through faith in Jesus Christ, people

from diverse cultural backgrounds have become one with Christ.

The early church consisted of Jewish people who believed in Jesus, many who struggled to overcome their prejudice against the non-Jews who were also becoming Christians.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

It is part of the sinful human nature to build protective barriers that shut out other people. What example of disunity, division and segregation have you observed within the last month?

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Read Ephesians 2:11-16. How does Paul describe the Gentiles before they became part of the new group of believers?

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What did Jesus do specifically for the Gentiles on the one hand (verses 12-14) and for the Jewish people on the other hand (verses 14-15)?

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Read Ephesians 2:16-18. We still see divisions among Christians today even though Christ himself is our peace (refer to verses 14-18). How can those who are united in Christ still be divided?

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Read Ephesians 2:19-22. What analogy does Paul use to describe the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles?

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How does this emphasize the unity Christians have with one another?

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Compare this analogy to Romans 9:30-33, 1 Corinthians 3:10-16 and 1 Peter 2:6. Do you think these analogies reinforce each other or not? Why?

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Read Ephesians 3:1- 6. What exactly was the mystery made known to Paul? (Refer to Romans 16:25-26 and Colossians 1:26-27.)

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How did Paul know the solution to the mystery?

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Read Ephesians 3:7-9. What is Paul's role in the revealing of this mystery?

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Read Ephesians 3:10-11. What amazing truth do we discover about our churches in verses 10-11? What purpose does God have for the church?

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How does your attitude towards the church compare and/or contrast with Paul's?

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Read Ephesians 3:12-13. How does Paul, who is in prison (see Ephesians 1:1) see his sufferings? How should the Ephesians see his sufferings?

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The words grace, power, privilege and honour (Refer to verses 7,8 and 13), can be used to describe Paul's view of his ministry. What role does these words play in your view or your ministry as a witness of Christ?

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Closing remarks:

The closing verses of chapter 2 take one of the central symbols of Judaism and turned it inside out. The temple of Jerusalem was the religious heart of the nation, as well as the political, social and cultural heart of Jerusalem. The reason for this was that Israel's God had promised to live there. Many believed that to be the place that heaven and earth met.

But now Paul is declaring that the living God is constructing a new temple. It consists not of stones, arches, pillars and altars, but of human beings. In Ephesians 3 verse 10 Paul explains that the church is a community in which men, women and children of every race, colour, social and cultural background come together in glad worship of the one true God.

God has always been deeply concerned about the unity of His people. By Salvation, He has effected real spiritual oneness. He has created a commonness based on sharing the same eternal life. The reality of conversion should impact the life of the church by being the reason for practical unity.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

... you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,

Ephesians 2:19 (NIV)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Ephesians 2:11-22 and Ephesians 3:1-13

Discussion questions

It is part of the sinful human nature to build protective barriers that shut out other people. What example of disunity, division and segregation have you observed within the last month? Discuss in the group.

Read Ephesians 2:14-18. We still see divisions among Christians today even though Christ himself is our peace. How can those who are united in Christ still be divided? How can these divisions be bridged? Discuss.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22. What analogy does Paul use to describe the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles? How does this emphasize the unity Christians have with one another?

Read Ephesians 3:1-11. What amazing truth do we discover about our churches in verses 10-11? What purpose does God have for the church?

How does your attitude towards the church compare and/or contrast with Paul's? What should change? Discuss in the group.

The words grace, power, privilege and honour (Refer to verses 7,8 and 13), can be used to describe Paul's view of his ministry. What role does these words play in your view or your ministry as a witness of Christ? Discuss in the group.

Close in prayer