

Studies on Ephesians

Study 3: Ephesians 2:11-22

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Background

In the beginning of chapter 2, Paul begins to explain the steps by which God will accomplish His purposes, beginning with the salvation of individuals, both Jew and Gentile alike. In the remainder of chapter 2, Paul moves from the salvation of individuals to another aspect of salvation in which God reconciles Jews and Gentiles, previously hostile peoples, not only to Himself but to each other through Christ (verses 11-16). Even more than that, God unites these now reconciled people in one body, a truth introduced in verses 19-22 and explained in Chapter 3.

The Message

Verses 11-12

Paul distinguishes the Ephesians in two ways:

- i. By their physical condition – Gentiles
- ii. By their spiritual condition – Uncircumcised

Gentiles

As Gentiles they were aliens in a foreign land. The land that God had given to Abraham and his offspring, the commonwealth of Israel (Genesis 35:10-12).

Uncircumcised

Spiritually they were strangers to the covenants of promise and consequently without hope, without God in the world. Paul encourages the Ephesians to reflect on the sinfulness and misery of the state they were in before knowing Jesus Christ (verse 11). Remembering where we have come from is important too for us and where we are now (Acts 10:28).

Paul addresses this letter to both Jews and Gentiles alike. In Romans 2:28-29 Paul contests the view that physical circumcision alone can bring salvation in this world and the next. For him the only true circumcision is that of the heart, which is the Spirit's work through confession of sins to God and being born again in Christ (Colossians 2:11-12). It follows, then, that the physical sign is unimportant; what counts is being in Christ. Believers are the real circumcision (Philippians 3:3), so that Gentile Christians need not receive circumcision nor Jewish Christians remove its marks (1 Corinthians 7:18-19).

Verses 13-18

In Christ Jesus is brought reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, and a new life of completeness and wholeness is found.

He is our peace

He made peace and came to reconcile. He destroyed the barrier, the ceremonial law, called the dividing wall by way of allusion to the barrier in the temple, which separated the court of the Gentiles from that into which the Jews only had liberty to enter.

He has abolished the Law

By His sufferings in the flesh, He took away the binding power of the ceremonial law, the law with its commandments and regulations. By taking these out of the way He formed one church of believers, whether they had been Jew or Gentile. Thus He created in Himself one new man out of the two. He framed both these parties into one new society, thus making peace. Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment of the Law.

Reconciliation is to God

Enmity and hostility are all part of the curse that came to Adam and Eve through their disobedience to God. In Ephesians we find Paul saying that before people can be reconciled to one another they must be reconciled to God. Once again we are brought back to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, since we can only be reconciled to God through the cross.

Access is through the Spirit

Through Jesus, the Spirit does not discriminate. Unity in Christ transcends ethnic, social and sexual distinctions (see also Romans 10:12, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:28). The work of the Spirit is to bring us to the Father in unity, never in division.

We have gone into some depth to try and make clear the importance of these verses of scripture, and to their relevance today. It is vital that we should understand the significance of the “Jews and the Gentiles”, and how they are both a significant part of God’s plans and purposes. To finish let us discuss together the remaining four verses.

Verses 19-22

Consequently we are no longer “strangers and aliens” but rather we are:

- i. Citizens with the saints
- ii. Members of the household of God
- iii. Built with God as the architect
- iv. An evolving growing structure
- v. A dwelling place for God

Questions

- i. When you are ‘in the world’ do you sometimes feel like a stranger in a strange land, an alien in a foreign land? The Bible tells us that we do not belong to the world (John 15:18-19). See also 2 Corinthians 10:1-6
- ii. What do you think might make the circumcision of the heart apparent?
- iii. What do verses 19 to 22 tell you about models of the church? Which aspects do you identify most with in your church?