



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 2.11-22

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our fall series Welcome Home, engaging the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, seeing how Christ has made peace in the family of God.

II. Connecting With One Another

Where have you seen people band strongly together in unity (for instance, a team, a family, etc.)? Why did they do so? What was the result?

III. Study the Text

- a. Reread last week's text, Ephesians 2.1-10, recalling Paul's use of the word "you" (by which he directly addressed Gentiles) as well as "we" (which included both Gentiles and Jews).

What else stands out to you in verses 1-10? Why?

- b. Read Ephesians 2.11-13.

These verses continue a major theme from verses 1-10: that human beings are, by nature, alienated from God. Paul explores that theme with reference to circumcision, a practice through which God's people were set apart from other nations.

Read Genesis 17, where this practice was originally introduced, then 1st Corinthians 7.17-24 (notice especially verse 19). How do you understand the development of thought between Genesis 17 and Paul's letter to the church in Corinth? Why do you think Paul says what he does?

- c. In Ephesians 2.12, Paul writes, "at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise..." The Greek word for "excluded" is *apallotrioō*, and can be translated "to estrange, exclude, alienate, or be shut out from one's fellowship and intimacy."

Paul uses *apallotrioō* in Ephesians 4.18 and Colossians 1.21 as well, referring in both instances to only spiritual alienation. What other dimension of life does he refer to in Ephesians 2.12? (Need a hint? Check the bottom of the page) Why is it important that he engages this dimension of life, too?

- d. The word "alienation" was borrowed from German theologian Ludwig Feuerbach and popularized by Karl Marx, who used it to argue the plight of workers in what he believed was the basis of class struggle. Essentially, he argued, "Every worker puts into his craftsmanship a part of himself. When his employer then sells his product, he is guilty, at least in part, of alienating the worker from himself."

Of course, long before Marx and Feuerbach wrote of alienation, the Scriptures spoke of alienation from our Creator and from one another. Where do you see alienation, exclusion, and estrangement today? How have alienation, exclusion, and estrangement impacted your life?

- e. Time permitting, read Genesis 1.1-3.19 and 6.9-9.17, noticing themes of alienation. Whom is alienated from whom? Why?

- f. Though God chose the Jewish people to be "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 60.3), over time they forgot their vocation, twisted privilege into favoritism, and began detesting other peoples.

Scholar William Barclay writes, "The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made."

Simply put, there is our "vertical" relationship with God and our "horizontal" relationship with other humans (note the phrase "excluded from citizenship in Israel").

Where do you see this kind of alienation between people groups today? Why do you think it exists? What can be done about it?

Do you think Christians ever fall into an "immense contempt" for others? Why does this happen? What can be done about it?

- g. What does Paul mean in verse 13 that "you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ"? What does that mean for the previous questions (under f)?
- h. Read Ephesians 2.14-18.

The "dividing wall of hostility" referenced in verse 14 was a notable feature of the first century Jerusalem temple. The temple building itself was on a platform and around it was the Court of Priests. To the east was the Court of Israel, further east the Court of Women. Each of these three courts was on the same level as the temple itself. Below the court for Jewish women, however, were five descending steps, a walled platform, then another fourteen descending steps to another wall, beyond which was the Court of the Gentiles. (See a graphical representation with a Google Image search of "Herod the Great Temple Layout")

Thus, Gentiles could look up and view the temple, but could not approach it. Signs in the Gentile court read not "Trespassers will be prosecuted" but rather "Trespassers will be executed."

Imagine you're a first century Jew. What would this architecture positively communicate to you about your faith?

Imagine you're a first century Gentile. What would this architecture negatively communicate to you about *their* faith?

How do Christians build metaphorical walls today?

- i. It seems as though verse 17 references both Isaiah 52.7 and 57.19. It's clear that Paul sees Jesus as the fulfillment of promises in Isaiah 55.5 and 56.6-7. Look up each of these passages, noting any connections with Ephesians 2 below:

Isaiah 52.7 _____

Isaiah 55.5 _____

Isaiah 56.6-7 _____

Isaiah 57.19 _____

- j. How can Jesus put to death *someone else's* hostility? What hostility do you need put to death?
- k. Read Ephesians 2.19-22.

After painting a portrait of an alienated humanity (verses 11-12) and the peacemaking Christ (13-18), in verses 19-22 Paul describes God's new society with three metaphors: God's kingdom (verse 19a), God's family (19b) and God's temple (20-22).

Perhaps the first was inspired by the Roman political system under which he was imprisoned, the second by the words of Jesus (who taught us to pray, saying "Abba, Father"), and the third with reference to the temple's dividing wall we addressed earlier.

Why would each of these metaphors be important for the Ephesian Christians?

Why should they be important to us? (For instance, what do they imply about our political allegiance, the importance of our church family, and the importance of being an access point for people to come to know God?)

- l. In engaging these verses, John Stott wrote, "Unless it is constantly and securely related to Christ, the church's unity will disintegrate and its growth either stop or run wild." What do you think he means by that? Do you agree? Why or why not?

IV. Pray

- a. Pray for Good Shepherd as a whole, that we would be constantly and securely related to Christ in all that we do,
- b. Lift up those you know - by name - who have not yet been "brought near" by Jesus, asking that God would somehow use you to influence their doing so,
- c. Pray for an unity within the church, both local churches like Good Shepherd, and the "holy catholic church" worldwide.