

From Strangers to Citizens

August 23, 2002

- ***What examples of disunity and division, segregation and schism, have you observed in the past?***

Ephesians 2:11-22

(NASB) 11 Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," [which is] performed in the flesh by human hands-- 12 [remember] that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both [groups into] one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, [which is] the Law of commandments [contained] in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, [thus] establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. 17 And 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 our access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner [stone], 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Remember that Paul examined an individual's salvation in verses 1-10. He instructed the Ephesians regarding their passing from death to life. Remember that Paul examined the past state of sinfulness, the loving and gracious response of God and the end result of walking in good works. Here in verses 11-22, Paul illustrates the process of salvation described in verses 1-10. He pictures the corporate body moving from being strangers apart from Christ to being citizens of Christ's kingdom. Paul explains to the Ephesians (most are Gentiles) how they were previously separated from Christ, were reconciled through Christ and as a result were unified along with believing Jews in Christ. Notice that both passages incorporate the same three aspects: 1) The past state, 2) The point of change and 3) The end result.

Separation from Christ (vs. 11-12)

- ***Who is Paul identifying as "the uncircumcision" and "the so-called circumcision"?***

Paul clearly identifies the Gentiles as the uncircumcision. He is referring to Jews as the "so-called circumcision." Paul refers to the Jews as the so-called circumcision because Moses and Jeremiah referred to the true circumcision as a circumcision of the heart—that is obedience in faith. (Compare Romans 2:28-29; Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4)

- ***How does Paul describe the former state of the Gentiles and what do these descriptions mean?***

First, separate from Christ: The Ephesians were formerly Christless. They had no Messianic hope. They had no expectation of a coming deliverer. They were completely without Christ.

Second, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel: God had made Israel His chosen people. He was both King and Lord over the nation of Israel. God had given Israel His special blessing, protection and love. He gave Israel His covenants, His law, His promises and His guidance. But according to Psalm 147:20, God has not dealt with any other nation that way. The Gentiles were completely without such citizenship. [Adapted from MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary, Ephesians*, p. 72]

Third, strangers to the covenants of promise: The Gentiles were without a covenant with God. While the blessing of the Gentiles is included in God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), God did not make any covenants with the Gentile nations. The Gentiles were "aliens" and "strangers"—and the Jews never let them forget it. [Wiersbe, *Be Rich*, p. 55]

Fourth, having no hope: Hope spoken of here is the consummation of life, the confident assurance of a blessed future in the plan of God. The Gentiles were completely hopeless. Their existence was pitiful and meaningless. [Adapted from MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary, Ephesians*, p. 73]

Fifth, without God in the World: The Gentiles had plenty of Gods, but were without the one true God. The Lord didn't reject the Gentiles, but the Gentiles rejected Him. God was clearly revealed to them through creation (Romans 1:19-20) and through their own conscience (Romans 2:14-15). Yet they rejected Him by suppressing the truth about Him (Romans 1:21).

- *Ultimately what do these descriptions mean about the former state of these Gentiles in Ephesus?*

Reconciliation through Christ (vs. 13-18)

- *According to verse 13, what is the Gentiles new relationship, and how has it been established?*
- *What was the "barrier" between Gentiles and Jews before Christ (verses 14-15)?*
- *How did Jesus reconcile Jews and Gentiles; that is how did He break the barrier between them (verses 14-16)?*
- *What do you think is the peace that Jesus preached (verse 17)?*
- *What result of Christ's work does verse 18 describe?*

Note: Christ provides access to the Father by one Spirit (the Holy Spirit), who helps us when we pray (Romans 8:26-27) and who baptizes and unifies us into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13). Note that all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned in this verse.

Unification in Christ (vs. 19-22)

- *What end result of Christ's work on the cross is described in verses 19-22?*

First, we are united as citizens in God's Kingdom: Whether believers were previously strangers and outcasts or former aliens and guests, all believers both Jew and Gentile are in Christ and become fellow citizens of God's kingdom with the saints—believers from every age who have trusted in Christ. We are citizens of heaven (cf. Philippians 3:20). [Adapted from MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary, Ephesians*, p. 81]

Second, we are united as God's Household: God's gracious work in Christ draws even closer and makes us members of His own household. Remember according to Ephesians 1:5, "*He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.*" Both Jews and Gentiles are adopted into the household of God as His sons through the work of Christ on the cross.

Third, we are united into God's Temple: The *foundation* of that temple is the New Testament apostles and prophets who laid the foundation as they taught divine revelation from God, which has taken on written form as the New Testament. The *corner stone* of the foundation is Christ Jesus Himself. The corner stone was a major structural part of ancient buildings. It had to be strong enough to support the rest of the building and it served as the unifier of the entire building. Clearly the whole building of the church is being fitted together and held together by Christ, its head and corner stone. In addition to the foundation and corner stone, all believers, both Jew and Gentile, are being built together into a dwelling of God.

Conclusion:

"Through the blood, the suffering flesh, the cross, and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, aliens become citizens, strangers become family, idolaters become the temple of the true God, the hopeless inherit the promises of God, those without Christ become one in Christ, those far off are brought near, and the godless are reconciled to God." [MacArthur, P. 83]

APPLICATION:

It may be that you have not trusted in Christ as your Lord & Savior and have not been reconciled to God.

It may be that you have been at odds with a friend, a fellow believer or a family member.

- ***What act of reconciliation do you sense God leading you to pursue as a result of this study?***