

Bringing It Home

Think of a person you are at odds with. Why are you at odds? How does the gospel free you up from resentment and bitterness? How can you move forward?

People from hundreds of different cultures comprise the household of God. We can certainly choose to focus on the differences but what do we all have in common as believers? What do we have in common even with those who not yet believe?

As a member of God's household, we have LOTS of brothers and sisters. What would a church (a community of Christians) look like that was truly living out the vision of this passage?

What do each of us need to do to get there?

CLOSING PRAYER: : Pray for the leadership of our church, pray for unity in the body, pray for unity in your group, in your relationships and in your family.



Letters

“The Prison letters of Paul” Growth Group Study Guide Week 7: God’s Vision for the Church Ephesians 2: 11-22

Series Overview: Philipians, Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians are collectively referred to as the "Prison Letters." The Apostle Paul wrote them while he was imprisoned in Rome. The prison was probably a house where Paul was kept under close guard at all times (probably chained to a soldier). But he was given a number of freedoms not offered to most prisoners. Among them was the freedom to write letters and receive visitors.

The letters Paul wrote were addressed to churches he had started. And even though they dealt with the kind of practical issues you might expect new churches to be dealing with, they are also bold declarations of theological truth. They are messages to the faithful about what God intended the church to be and to do. It is a clarification of the church's mission and identity. Paul is basically saying to the church, "THIS IS US. This is who we are." The church is not a perfect place and it's not always easy living out our faith. But it is possible. And when we do it, it changes the world.

Week 7: God's Vision for the Church

Ephesians 2: 11-22

Overview:

Historically, Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) kept their distance from each other. Jews considered Gentiles beyond God's saving power and therefore without hope. Gentiles resented these claims that only seemed designed to make them feel like they were on the outside, looking in. Interestingly, one of the reasons that Paul is writing this letter from prison is because he has been falsely charged with taking a non-Jew inside the temple in Jerusalem. That was considered such a breach of Jewish law that the Romans permitted Jewish leaders to execute violators. But Paul declares that the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile is shattered in Christ. Christ breaks down the walls of prejudice in every area of culture and reconciles all believers to God and to each other.

Getting Warmed Up

Remember a time in your life when you felt like an outsider. How would you describe that experience?

Did you become an insider in time OR did you remain on the outside?

Digging In

Read Ephesians 2:11-22 aloud.

List everything that Paul tells the Ephesians to remember in verse 12. In your opinion, which of the five phrases seems most severe?

How does Paul describe their life prior to Christ? Go back to Ephesians 2:1-3. How does that description differ from what Paul says in v12?

What time is Paul referring to in verse 12 when he says, "at that time" and what does that tell us?

There was great tension between Jews and Gentiles when Paul wrote this. What are some ways, according to verses 14-16, that Christ brought peace?

Read verse 16-18 again. How did Christ abolish the hostility between Jews and Gentiles?

Paul said that the Ephesians were formerly far off and had been brought near (v17). What are some of the images that God uses to describe this new entity encompassing Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians?