THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

STUDY 3 THE CHURCH AS TRUE ISRAEL

Ephesians 2:1-22

One of the most challenging questions Paul had to answer was the relationship between Jew and Gentile. The problem was this: in the Old Testament the Jews are depicted consistently as God's own people. Jesus ministry was directed to Jews. He called on them to repent. His ministry looked forward to a restored and believing Jewish people of God. It was only after the Jews rejected him and had him put to death, that as the risen Christ he sent his disciples to all nations to make disciples (Matt. 28:19). From Acts we learn that at first the apostles thought that the people of God would still be primarily Jews, Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. However, God's vision was bigger. He made it plain to the apostles that the Gospel was also for the Gentiles and he put Paul in charge of the mission to the Gentiles. By the time Paul writes to the Ephesians there are more Gentile believers than Jewish believers.

In Ephesians chapter 2 Paul seeks to answer the question of the present status of Jew and Gentile. He argues that what God has done is to redefine what it means to be a Jew, one of God's elect people. It is now to believe in Christ. The old division between Jew and Gentile is gone. The only division that now is of significance is between those who believe in Christ and those who do not.

His argument is this. We are all sinners, Jew and Gentile; we are all saved by grace alone; those who believe in Christ are one new people of God, true Israel, the church.

Read aloud in the group the whole chapter, possibly by people reading two verses each.

Verses 1-3: Paul speaks of what all the Ephesian Christians once were.

Q. 1. List what they and perhaps you once were.

Q. 2. What picture does Paul paint of life outside of Christ?

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Verses 5-10: Paul speaks of the 'immeasurable riches of his grace.' Grace may be defined as God's undeserved favour.

Q. 3. In verses 1 and 5 Paul speaks of the Ephesians as once being 'dead' and in verse 5 of having been made 'alive together with Christ.' What is he talking about?

Q. 4. Make a list of all the things we learn about God's grace in vv 4-10?

Q. 5. When Paul says we are not saved by our 'own doing' (verse 8), what does he mean? How do you relate this to the messages that bombard us from contemporary society?

In verse 11 and following Paul speaks directly to the Gentile majority in

Once you were	***Now you are***
Without Christ (verse 12).	In Christ (verse 13).
Aliens to Israel (verses 12, 19).	Fellow citizens of Israel (verse 19).
Strangers (to the people of God) (verse 12).	In the family of God (verse 19)
Without hope (verse 12).	With hope (verse 13).
Far off (from God) (verses 13, 17).	Brought near (to God) (verses 13, 17).

the church at Ephesus. His words imply the Jewish believers (or some of them) were suggesting that Gentile believers are second rate members of the people of God, or conversely, the Christians who are most pleasing to God are Jewish believers. Paul will have nothing of this. He is adamant; all believers stand on level ground before God. There can be no first and second class Christians. All are forgiven sinners, saved by the grace of God. To make his point he contrasts their status once as Gentile unbelievers and now as believers in Christ.

Q. 6. How do you think the Gentile believers felt when they read Paul saying these things? And how do you think the Jewish believers felt?

Q. 7. Why is it that some Christians want to think they are a class apart, better Christians, than others? What are the sources of spiritual pride?

Q. 8. How do you feel when someone seems to put you down in this way?

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In Ephesians Paul writes to bring unity to the Christians in that city. He sees their disunity as a denial of their oneness in Christ.

Q. 9. Is there any significant disunity in our church? If so, what do you think Paul would say to us?

Q. 10. What do you think Paul would say about the disunity today among Christians throughout the world?

Q. 11. In verse 21 Paul speaks of the congregation as growing 'into a holy temple in the Lord'.

What does this imagery suggest to you? How could this imagery help us in our thinking about our congregation? What does it mean to 'grow' as a church? Look back over the last few years and identify ways in which your church has grown? Does it match the ways Paul thinks of a growing church?

Q. 12. What have you learned from this study? In what ways has it helped you think about what it means to be a church member? A number of people in the group may like to respond to this question.

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