

EPHESIANS

WHO I AM AND WHY IT MATTERS

All of us walk through seasons of change in our lives. We mature from child to teenager and ultimately to adult. Then there are the more immediate changes like leaving for college. Overnight, everything is different. Perhaps, like many folks, you moved to NWA from another part of the country or world because of a job that led to significant changes for you and your family. Life comes at you fast – it's constantly changing. Today, our passage is all about the change that Jesus brings to your life at salvation and the ongoing changes that occur as you mature in your walk with God.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-22

Discussion Questions:

1. Looking back at your notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most?
2. What do the following phrases mean when describing the Gentiles: Separated from Christ? Excluded from the commonwealth of Israel? Strangers to the covenant promises? Without God in the world?

The Gentiles were separated from Christ (a Jew himself), who was promised as the King of the Jews – their deliverer.

Gentiles were not citizens of Israel. They were aliens/foreigners. The best they could do was be second-rate residents of Israel.

They were strangers to the covenant promises. God's covenant promise was made with Abraham and included land, a priesthood, many people, and a nation. The Gentiles were not descendants of Abraham, so they were not included in the covenant.

The Gentiles were without God. They didn't know God, nor did they follow God.

3. Why do you think Paul calls the Christian Gentiles in Ephesus to remember their condition before salvation in Christ? What good does it do for us to remember our lives before Christ?

"Paul urges the church to 'remember' these things so they may live with a greater sense of gratitude to God and greater love for one another as members of the church." – Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition, Ephesians

4. What was the original purpose for circumcision among the Jews? What does it mean that the Jews were proud of their circumcision and looked down on the Gentiles? In what ways are you most tempted to look down on others, like how the Jews looked down on the Gentiles?

Circumcision was required of all of Abraham's descendants as a sign of God's covenant with him in Genesis 17:9-14.

"He argues that Jewish circumcision is only an outward sign of being set apart to God. However, if the heart is sinful, then physical circumcision is of no avail. A circumcised body and a sinful heart are at odds with each other. Rather than focus on external rites, Paul focuses on the condition of the heart. Using circumcision as a metaphor, he says that only the Holy Spirit can purify a heart and set us apart to God. Ultimately, circumcision cannot make a person right with God; the Law is not enough. A person's heart must change."

<https://www.gotquestions.org/circumcision-of-the-heart.html>

5. What does Paul mean when he says Christ "broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" so "that he might create in himself one new man"? How can we follow Christ and model reconciliation in our lives?

"Christ's blood has obliterated the old, long-standing division between Jew and Gentile. While Paul was writing this letter, there was a literal wall standing in the temple that excluded the Gentiles. Josephus tells us that attached to this barrier at intervals were messages in Greek and Latin, warning that the Gentiles must not proceed further lest they die. "... "While Paul could be referencing a literal wall in the temple, it seems more likely that he is referring to the barrier of 'the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations,' the ceremonial law (v. 15)." – Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition, Ephesians

"Paul speaks of the double reconciliation that has taken place, stating that the hostility has been put to death. Stott says, 'God turned away his own wrath, and we, seeing his great love, turned away ours also' (Ephesians, 102). Jesus' death has ended the hostility. Consequently, Christians are to be people who forgive one another because of the forgiveness of Christ (Ephesians 4:32)." – Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition, Ephesians

6. What do verses 19-22 teach us about the nature of the church? How should today's passage influence how we think about the church, locally and globally? See Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11.

Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Colossians 3:11, "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all."

7. How essential is unity in the church? What does it look like for a church to be unified? What impact can a unified church have in the world? What role do you play when it comes to unity in the church?

“Satan always hates Christian fellowship; it is his policy to keep Christians apart. Anything which can divide saints from one another he delights in. He attaches far more importance to godly intercourse than we do. Since union is strength, he does his best to promote separation.” – Charles Spurgeon

“Pursuing the unity of the church does not mean that we should stop caring about theology. But it does mean that our love of theology should never exceed our love of real people, and therefore we must learn to love people amid our theological disagreements.” – Gavin Ortlund

“Friends, the unity of the church was so valuable to Jesus that he died for it. If we care about sound theology, let us care about unity as well.” – Gavin Ortlund

“I have never yet known the Spirit of God to work where the Lord's people were divided.” – D. L. Moody

“A common vision can unite people of very different temperaments.” – Tim Keller

8. What's one personal takeaway from today's study you can focus on applying in your life this week?