

Jeff's Org

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? • THE CHURCH IS A FAMILY • EPHESIANS 2:11-20 • NO DATE

MAIN POINT

When we are born again in Christ, we are born into a new family that transcends race, culture, and creed.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What one word would you use to describe your family right now? Why?

Is there a different word you would use to describe your family when you were a child? If those words are different, what does that indicate about the way you see your family now?

Do you often think of the church as being the family of God? Why or why not?

Whether we know it or not, every Christian belongs to a family alongside the one you grew up with. It's a family that extends beyond race, culture, or creed. But it's a family that is linked together with the unbreakable bond of faith in Jesus Christ. The church is the family of God.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ EPHESIANS 2:11-20.

What can you glean about the audience Paul was writing to based on this passage?

Who were they? What kinds of problems did they face?

How has Christ destroyed hostility and made peace possible for all people (v. 14)?

According to verses 14-18, what are the positive results of this wall coming down?

Which one is the most significant to you and why?

Paul wrote that Gentiles, who had once been separated from God and excluded from His family, had now been brought into God's new people—the church—through the death of Jesus. That's the same family that we are a part of.

What kinds of things make the family of God different from any other family?

What about the family you grew up in? What is different about the family of God and your natural family?

What sorts of barriers are crossed in the family of God that might keep people apart in other situations?

The family of God is not dependent on race, gender, or any other natural factor. While these things might separate people in other situations, our differences in the family of God only serve to highlight the greatness of what we have in common.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GALATIANS 3:28.

What similarities do you see between this verse and the passage from Ephesians?

What does this verse teach you about the nature of God's family?

How does the fact that all different kinds of people come together in the family of God highlight the power of Jesus?

What, then, is our responsibility as members of this family?

Because God has brought us all together in Christ, we must make sure we don't set up barriers that God has torn down. We must love and value every member of God's family regardless of their background. That's part of what it means to be a family—that we connect with, support, and provide encouragement to each other.

The family of God is meant to connect deeply with, support, and provide encouragement to each other. Share about a particular time when you experienced one of these characteristics of family at work at our church.

Is it ever difficult to practice these characteristics of God's family? When?

Which do you most need from the family of God right now? Why?

When the family of God functions as a healthy family, people of all sorts find hope, encouragement, and support in our midst. Regardless of what kind of family people come from, they should find in the church an example of the love and support they get from their Heavenly Father. When this happens, people not only connect with and love each other more deeply, but they also experience in tangible ways the love and support God Himself has for them.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 10:21-25.

What did the writer of Hebrews encourage the family of God to do? What did he warn them not to do?

Why is it important for a family to be together, in person, regularly? What happens when they aren't?

Based on this passage, how should the family of God motivate each other?

What is one way you might be more supportive of God's family this week?

PRAYER

Thank God for the gift of the church. Ask Him to give you a greater passion and commitment to your spiritual family. Pray for specific members of God's family at our church who might be in need today.

COMMENTARY

| EPHESIANS 2:11-20

2:11. Paul asked those who were Gentiles to review what their lives had been like at one time, that is, before their salvation. (Gentiles were those who were not Jews either ethnically or religiously. That is, they had not descended from the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and they were not under the Old Testament covenant.) The alienation between Jews and Gentiles was based on observable differences in the flesh of both groups. For example, Jewish males had been marked by the religious ritual of circumcision. This rite symbolized that they belonged to the covenant family. Gentile males had no such mark. This led to an easy way for Jews to indulge in name-calling.

2:12. The terrible Gentile condition extended beyond racial discrimination. They had been deprived of the spiritual blessings that Jews had enjoyed for centuries. Paul mentioned five areas of deficit. (1) Were without the Messiah: the Jews expected a coming King who would rule the world in righteousness. Their Scriptures were clear, and the Gospels show that initially many first-century Jews readily welcomed Jesus because they expected their Messiah to come (John

1:41). (2) Excluded from the citizenship of Israel: the Israelite nation had been founded under God's direction. God was their true King. (3) Were foreigners to the covenants of the promise: God's covenants (solemn agreements) had been made only with Israelites, such as Abraham and David (Gen. 15; 2 Sam. 7). (4) Were without hope: therefore, Gentiles were without the hope that Jews had for the Messiah. Furthermore, they were without any hope of salvation or eternal life. Although God had planned to include Gentiles in His salvation, they knew nothing about it until they heard the gospel. (5) Were without God in the world: the phrase without God also can be translated as "godless." The Gentiles had plenty of gods, but they were without knowledge of the one true God. They had no personal relationship with Him.

2:13. Paul had starkly reminded his Gentile readers that they had been hopeless and godless before their salvation. Or, as he put it in this verse, Gentiles had been far away from God. The words But now mark a transition. Because through faith Gentiles now are in Christ, the past deprivation is gone. They have now been brought near. Paul explained the means by which this happened: the blood of the Messiah. Only by the atoning death of the Jewish Messiah could Gentiles (or Jews, for that matter) come into a right and near relationship with God. In these verses Paul spoke both to Gentile believers ("you") and to Jewish Christians ("we"). He described how both groups have been joined together into God's new people.

2:14. Hostility (antagonism) characterized the natural relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul taught that peace (cessation of hostility, harmonious friendship) summarizes the supernatural relationship between these groups, brought about because He (the Messiah) removed the barriers between them. Through His death, Jesus made both groups one. Where there had been two hostile parties—Jews and Gentiles—there was now a third possibility, the body of Christ.

2:15. The main issue separating Jew and Gentile was the law of the commandments in regulations. By this Paul referred to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, such as those concerning sacrifices, dietary restrictions, and ritual cleanness (see also Col. 2:16-17). Jesus did not abolish the moral laws of the Old Testament. These laws show how God's people ought to live. Furthermore, even moral laws were never intended by God as a means for salvation (see Rom. 3:20). Ceremonial Jewish regulations were done away with by His death; they were shadows pointing forward to His coming. Now that Jesus has come, the shadows have vanished in His light. He has now created one new man—a new humanity—from the two old groups, Jews and Gentiles. In Christ, there is now peace both between Jews and Gentiles as well as between humans and God.

2:16. Not only did Jews and Gentiles need to be reconciled to each other, but members of both groups—sinners

all—needed to come into right relationship with God. Thus, Jesus died also so that He might reconcile both groups to God. He did this by dying for them in one body, the church (5:25).

2:17. Jesus' death did not automatically unite all Jews and all Gentiles into one body; neither did it automatically reconcile all persons to God. Yet His death was essential. Paul now turned to another essential ingredient to the gospel—its proclamation. Both Jews and Gentiles needed to hear the message of reconciliation and respond to it. At Jesus' coming, He first proclaimed peace to those who were near, that is, to the Jews. Historically, the gospel came first to them. Through the apostles and the early Christian preachers, the message was also declared to the Gentiles, who were far away (Rom. 1:16).

2:18. The death of Jesus is the only means by which we both—Jews and Gentiles— have access to God. Although Jews had been near, they did not think of themselves as having intimate access to God. The entire sacrificial system reminded them of their sins and the unapproachable holiness of God. Now all believers can come to God intimately, as our Father. Our connection to God is granted by one Spirit, given alike to all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, free or slave, rich or poor.

2:19. The "you" language throughout this passage refers to those born as Gentiles. Such believers are no longer what they were. The word foreigners was a reminder of their previous deprivation as those "excluded from the citizenship of Israel" (2:12). The term strangers was a reminder that Gentiles had no knowledge of "the covenants of the promise" (2:12). By contrast, in the new humanity Jews and Gentiles together are fellow citizens with one another in the kingdom of God. The saints may refer either to Old Testament people or to all believers in the church (1:1). If the term citizens suggests that Jewish and Gentile believers are part of the same kingdom, then members of God's household means that both groups belong equally to God's one true family.

2:20. The architectural language compares the new humanity to a magnificent temple under construction. The foundation for this divine building is the apostles and prophets. Jesus' designated representatives were the apostles, whose preaching and writings are foundational to the church. The term prophets refers to inspired men who proclaimed the Word of God alongside the apostles. Churches today stand only when they depend on the foundational truths God revealed to the apostles and prophets, now preserved in the Scriptures. The cornerstone is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.