**Brought to Life; Brought Together**

**Believing and Belonging**

Ephesians 2:17-22

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 We are in our series, Brought to Life; Brought Together, based upon the New Testament letter of Ephesians. Today we are looking at chapter two so if you have your bibles, turn to Ephesians 2:17-22, for our message, Believing and Belonging. This chapter tells us that God has brought Gentiles into his new covenantal promises through the cross, making one new humanity. This passage can be divided into two sections, 17-18, tells us that Gentiles have equal access with Jews to God the Father through believing the gospel message; 19-22, believing Jews and Gentiles belong to the new people of God, the church, built on the foundation of Jesus himself (19-22). This is good news, as our advent reading illustrates. The Shepherds believe the good news and respond by praising God and sharing the good news to those around them. Christmas is a great opportunity to share the good news of Christmas or invite them to the Christmas Eve service.

Big Idea: The gospel unites Jews and Gentiles into God’s new covenant community, the church.

**Gentiles Are Members of God’s New Humanity (17-18)**

Last week we saw that under the Old Covenant, *Gentiles were excluded* from God’s covenants and God’s people. *But now Gentiles are included* or incorporated into God’s new covenant people because Christ nullified the law that created hostility between Jews and Gentiles. In doing so, he created one new humanity removing any barriers like laws or ethnicity that had previously separated them spiritual (Gal 3:21-29). Paul develops this truth in our passage.

He came and *preached peace* to those who were far off, Gentiles, and peace to those who were near, Jews. Gentiles are described as far off because they were excluded from God’s covenant promises and God’s people, Israel; the Jews are described as near because they had the privileges of being Israel (Rom 9:4-5). The gospel is a universal invitation to Jews and Gentiles. The content of this message is peace, *reconciliation with God* and with each other. The cross reconciles enemies to each other and reconciles enemies to God. Chapter one told us of *God’s eternal plan* to unite all things to himself (1:10) has started by reconciling Jews and Gentiles to himself and to each other. Paul even describes the gospel as the gospel of peace (6:15) and the New Covenant is described as the covenant of peace (see Isa 54-55, esp. Isa 54:9-10; 55:3). As a result, believing *Gentiles have equal access* with believing Jews to the Father (Rom 5:1-2). This new humanity has direct access to the presence of God by the sacrifice of Christ. This access is *in one Spirit*. The Spirit applies the work of Christ to us, making us alive and sealing us (1:13-14) and uniting us. So, the New Covenant incorporated Gentiles, created a new humanity by the cross.

**Gentiles Have a Place in God’s New Humanity (19-22)**

Verse nineteen starts with, so then, telling us that Paul is drawing a conclusion to what has said. It is that *Gentiles have a new identity*. So then, you *Gentiles are no longer no strangers and aliens*, referring back to verse twelve, they were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God (12). Before they came to faith, Gentiles were excluded from Christ, the people of God, and the covenants of promise but now Christ has reconciled them to God, they are fellow citizens with the God’s people, and members of God’s household. God has given Gentiles a new identity and *a new status*, members of God’s household. God has incorporated Gentiles as full members of God’s family. Under the Old Covenant, the defining characteristic of Israel as the people of God was their Jewishness as descendants of Abraham. With the New Covenant and the universal offer of the gospel to all people, the defining characteristic of the church as the people of God is no longer ethnicity but faith in Christ. The people of God has been redefined and expanded to include both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus. What was true under the Old Covenant physically is fulfilled in the New Covenant spiritually. So, now a true Jew is a spiritual one with a circumcised heart ([Rom. 2:28–29](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%202%3A28%E2%80%9329/); Col 2:11; see also Eph 2:12). The promises made to Abraham and to his offspring are narrowed in the New Covenant to the one offspring, who is Christ ([Gal. 3:16](https://www.esv.org/Gal.%203%3A16/)). So now all who believe in Jesus Christ belong to God’s family as sons of God and are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise ([Gal. 3:28–29](https://www.esv.org/Gal.%203%3A28%E2%80%9329/)). Gentiles have been incorporated into God’s new covenant people, which fulfills Israel as the people of God. Thus, Gentiles are fellow citizens with the saints, the church.

Then he goes on the say that this new people of God, *the church, is built on the foundation* of the apostles and the prophets, Christ himself being the cornerstone. Briefly, the apostles were those closely connected to Jesus during his earthly ministry and after his resurrection plus Paul. Their teaching was recognized as inspired by God this sense, the apostles replace the Old Testament prophets. The prophets are those through whom God speaks but it is not new revelation, subordinate to the apostles teaching, and prophets are subject to the elders of the local church. But more importantly, the *cornerstone of the foundation is Jesus Christ*. A cornerstone was a large stone placed in the corner of the foundation, that ensured the two walls coming off that corner were square. The church is described as a building that is built on the foundation of Christ. The Paul uses more Old Covenant imagery, the *church is growing into a holy temple* (1:5; 2:10) by God joining together the human stones on the cornerstone, the dwelling place for God. Under the Old Covenant, the temple was the dwelling place of God, where God met with his people. In the New Covenant, the church fulfills the temple, the dwelling place of God among his people. *The temple pointed to and is fulfilled in Christ,* who tabernacled among us, God with us, the church is the temple fulfilled, where God dwells with his people by his Spirit. Picture this, God the master mason, has cut human stones, Christ followers, as the raw material in which *God will fit them together to build his eternal temple, the church*. God is fitting them together, the church is viewed as a corporate solidarity of people – not alone rangers, not on the fringe, not an attender, but stones who are an integral and necessary part of the temple, the church. This destroys the modern understanding that my faith is primarily about me and Jesus while church is optional. He pictures Christians as what makes up and supports the structure of the church. It is a picture of the christian life married to the church. Paul is taking Old Covenant imagery and applying it to the church spiritually because he sees the church as the fulfillment of Israel, the new covenant community.

Questions for Life Groups:

1. What is the big idea of Ephesians 2:17-22?
2. How did God incorporate Gentiles into the people of God?
3. How are Jews and Gentiles now the people of God?
4. Why does Paul use so much imagery of Israel and apply it to the church?
5. What is the relationship of Israel and the church?
6. How is God speaking you through this passage?
7. How does this