

Read: Ephesians 2:13-22

Who Are Members of God's Family?

Ephesians 2:13-22

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let's start with a warning: Today's reading is hard to understand. Like this part which says, "You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household." What is the apostle Paul talking about?

To answer that, we need to do a real quick history lesson. From the Bible's view of things, the whole world is divided into two types of people, Jews and Gentiles. Have you heard that before? It especially is a feature when you read the Old Testament of the Bible.

The Jews were God's special people. They were descendants of a man named Abraham. His grandson was Jacob. Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and he had 12 sons that we often call—you guessed it—the children of Israel. One of Israel's sons was Judah, and after a while his was the only group left intact and in the Promised Land. After a time away from their land, they returned. The people of Judah became known as the Jews. God told these people that the Messiah (the name for God's "special chosen one") would come from their family! He gave the Jews his Word, his commands, and his promises. These promises were always meant for them. But not just for them. Remember the two types of people in the Bible? Jews *and* those who were not Jews. They were called Gentiles. God's promises were meant for both types of people.

At Jesus' time, the Jewish people had forgotten their purpose—to be a light and hope for the Gentiles. At Paul's time, the thought was that if you were a Jew you were God's child, but if you were a Gentile you were outside the family. But then... Jesus arrived! He came from the family

of Judah, but he came for both types of people. In Jesus, there is no more Jew or Gentile. God has reconciled (made peace with) the whole world. He has won forgiveness and, life, and peace for all. In Jesus, Paul says, you are no longer strangers or foreigners, you are actual members of his household! You are no longer outsiders or even second-class citizens. You are members of God's own family, his forgiven, dearly loved children! With all the benefits. Inheritance. Eternal life. A Father who promises to give you whatever you ask for as you ask in line with his will. Wow.

Are you a Jew or a Gentile? It doesn't matter. Jesus announces peace to both. No one is excluded. You can be at peace in him. That makes a huge difference in the way we live our lives. It makes a huge difference in the way we deal with people who are way different than we are. Let's invite them into God's house too, that we all might live at peace with God and at peace with each other too.

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- Who were the two different types of people in today's devotion? Which one are you?
- Which people did God bring into his family?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- What's the difference between a Jew and a Gentile?
- How did God bring Jews and Gentiles together into one family?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Discuss the different types of people in your church family and why that's actually a good thing
- What does it mean that God has *reconciled* the world to himself in Jesus? How will that show itself in our lives?

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming into our world to bring peace. Help us to live in peace, with God and with one another. Amen.