

**Ephesians:
God's New Family**

Date	Weekly Theme	
January 7	Ephesians 1	<i>All things belong to God</i>
January 14	Ephesians 2	<i>Radical Grace - People made for a purpose</i>
January 21	Ephesians 3	<i>The Servant Family</i>
January 28	Ephesians 4:1-24	<i>Family Unity</i>
February 4	Ephesians 4:25-6:9	<i>Living a new life</i>
February 11	Ephesians 6:10-24	<i>Family Armor</i>

Small Group Time

Take time to greet each other, share names if necessary. Share highs, lows, and prayer concerns as a group.

Read the text aloud – **Ephesians 3** (Differing versions if possible)

What did you hear?

What, if anything, caught your attention?

How does the overall message impact you?

Questions and Review from last week's discussion.

ALL are united in Christ.

Christ is the foundation (which is laid once) and we are formed together (which can be a jarring, painful process that takes time).

GROUP DISCUSSION

Address the following questions:

What do you think is Paul's reason to be a prisoner for Christ Jesus?

What would a church look like if they were all known as prisoners for Jesus?

Prisoners for Christ Jesus

- The Apostle Paul certainly knew about life in prison.
 - In a context that was highly hostile to outside influences, preaching the gospel of Christ was a serious and threatening occupation.
 - He was often imprisoned for his preaching. (Cf. His ordeal with the Romans (he was flogged within inches of his life until they discovered that he was a Roman citizen and had to be released.) The whole book of Philippians is written from a prison cell.)
 - So Paul drew upon his circumstances to learn more fully about the situation he found himself in with Christ.

- Why, exactly, does he consider himself to be a prisoner for Christ? What's his reasoning?
 - He had a heart for the Gentiles.
 - In Paul's experience with the living Lord, he came to know that he was set apart, or *called*, into a specific element of Christ's commission to the disciples. At the end of Matthew, Jesus calls the disciples to go, make disciples, baptize, teach, and remember that he is with them always. He tells them to go into all the nations. Paul understood himself to be Christ's instrument who would carry his good news to the Gentiles and to them specifically.
 - He didn't fuss much with other Jews. His personal understanding of his place in Christ's mission was for the Gentiles.
 - The disciples were hesitant in the beginning to go to all the nations. They set up shop in Jerusalem and forever became tied down to this base of operations. Peter has a particular reluctance about taking Christ's commission to other nations.
 - Paul, on the other hand, is a zealot. He tackles whatever task set before him with voraciousness and zeal. He goes for bear.

- We are the Gentiles.
 - Bethlehem Lutheran is a direct result of God's work through Paul and others to spread the good news of Jesus.
 - What is a Gentile? Someone who is outside the Jewish fold. Nations other than ancient Israel (not present day Israel!!).
 - They were not accustomed to the metaphors of the life of faith.
 - They had their own gods to worship and deal with.
 - They had no dealings with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, although God used Gentiles frequently to deal with the falterings of Israel.

- Painting the Gentile context in the Present Day.

Do some active reflection on where we find ourselves living today.
What is life like daily for us and our peers?
How often do we bump into the things of Christ, and how foreign do they often seem when it happens?
Do you see the kingdom of God present in your daily life? How often?
Are you willing to share an example?

- We live our lives in the prison of sin. It holds us captive. We are bound to it for this life.
 - So, we know a little bit about being prisoners ourselves.
 - Jesus came to proclaim release to the captives (cf. Luke 4ff). So, while it feels like we are bound to sin now, we also live our lives as freed people.
 - One day...this will be different
 - This is the mystery that Paul is talking about.
 - Many thought Jesus came only for those who are Jewish. That's how tradition was for them. Prophets came to them. Moses came to them. Abraham was their father.
 - But Jesus' charge to his disciples and to Paul was to widen the family included in his redemption. It is **nothing less** than the entire human family.
- Paul stands under his calling... "of *this* gospel..."
 - The word "gospel" in ancient times essentially meant "good news." It was as if a newsboy was standing on the street corners yelling "Gospel! Gospel!"
 - There were plenty of gospels in Paul's time as there are today.
 - Paul's understanding led him to develop a Gentilic worldview. This is akin to our global worldview. It's all inclusive, tolerant, gracious, compassionate, and urgent.
- His prayer shows his deep care and concern.
 - "may be strengthened in your inner being with *power*..."
 - The word *power* is the same as where we get our word for dynamite. Paul wants the Spirit to put dynamite in the Gentiles, especially the Ephesians!
 - "Christ may dwell in hearts through faith..."
 - So that the world may know to whom the Gentiles belong. It's a marker of sorts. We become representatives of *this* God whom we know in Jesus Christ.
 - "the power to comprehend..."
 - The fullness of the mystery that is revealed in all that Jesus means.
 - "know the love of Christ...filled with the fullness of God."
- This is the true hope toward which we are moving as a people. Right now, because of sin, we don't feel that fullness all the time. But soon, one day, we will be extremely full of it! Of God, that is!!

Questions and Processing

Closing Prayer

For Next Week:

Address the following questions:

What does the word "discipleship" mean to you?

How is discipleship an individual journey, and how is it communal?

How are you growing as a disciple?

What are the ways that you see that you need to mature in your life?

Why do people opt out of community?

What is your ministry?