

# YOU Are Included!!!

Sunday, 7/22 – 8:00 & 10:45 + Monday, 7/23 – 7 PM

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost / Eighth Sunday after Trinity – 2018

**Introduction:** Dear friends in Christ: Have you ever felt excluded? For example: ♣You didn't make the team **or** ♣your friends got together, *but you were NOT invited?* Far worse is being excluded from God's holy family!!!

Today we return to the letter written by Paul to the Christians living in Ephesus – *some were Jews, most were Gentiles:*

- Overall, chapters **1-3** focus on God's work to save all people, while chapters **4-6** focus on God's instructions for His holy children.
- **Chapter 1** focuses on God's surprising work to choose / adopt / redeem us in Christ; in other words: He decided to make us His own; *then He took powerful action to do it through Jesus' life and death!*
- **Chapter 2 – Part 1** focuses on ♣what we were and ♣what God did; in other words: We were dead in our sins and deserving God's wrath; then, *out of pure love*, God took radical action to **remove** our sins, **void** our ticket to hell, and **GIFT us** a one-way ticket to heaven!

Now, *as we focus on Chapter 2 – Part 2*, ♣the veil will be torn back and ♣we will see *an amazing oneness in Christ*; in other words, no one is excluded, thus EVERYONE is INCLUDED!!!

1. **Our Sad Past:** <sup>11</sup> **Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh [all of you non-Jews], called "the**

uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands--<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. // Let’s focus on circumcision, separation, and reality:

- a. Circumcision: When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD said to him, “...I will establish my covenant... to be God to you and to your offspring... Every male among you shall be circumcised. ...and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you” (Gen. 17:7, 10-11 ESV). So circumcision was meant to be “a visible sign of God’s promise to send a Savior... [And] the shedding of blood [when the circumcision took place] pointed to our final redemption by the shedding of Christ’s blood” (TLSB, 41).
  - b. Separation: In general, the circumcised ones – *thus the Jews* – were **with** God, while the uncircumcised ones – *the Gentiles, thus all non-Jews* – were **separated** from God. Even though some Gentiles – *like Rahab and Ruth* – were brought to faith in the coming Messiah, *most non-Jews were separated from God’s eternal blessings*.
  - c. Reality: Even though the descendants of Abraham were circumcised, “with most of them God was not pleased” (1 Cor. 10:5 ESV). And what happens with many who are baptized? The life of Christ is choked by “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches” (Matt. 13:22 ESV). Dear Holy Spirit, *keep us in Christ!*
2. **Our Happy Present:** <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you [Gentiles] who once were far off have been brought near

by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself [*that is, Christ*] is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances [*decrees, laws*], that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

a. Jesus' work (13-16): The Gentiles were light years away from God, but now, *IN CHRIST – by His shed blood, they have been made full members of God's holy family!* Jesus broke down the dividing wall, **first** – *by fulfilling all of God's righteous requirements on our behalf* (Matt. 5:17), **second** – *by bearing all sins and all punishment* (Isaiah 53:6; 1 John 2:2). Since our sin created *hostility between us and God*, Jesus removed our sin to make *peace between us and God!*

b. The proclamation of Jesus' work (17-18): During Jesus' ministry He told **who** He is and **what** He would do; *then He did it!* And then, *powered by the Holy Spirit*, the followers of Jesus went into the world to proclaim the good news of ✓ full forgiveness, ✓ peace with God, and ✓ eternal life *through faith in Jesus Christ!*

3. **Our Oneness in Christ:** <sup>19</sup> So then **you** [*Gentiles*] are no longer strangers [*excluded from the family of God*] and aliens [*non-members of the family of God*], but you are fellow citizens with the saints [*τῶν ἁγίων, the holy ones*] and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> [*having been*] built on the

foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole [building], being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.<sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place [of] God [in] the Spirit.

- a. Full members through Christ: Here at Bethlehem, some of us were **born** US citizens, while others became US citizens through the **immigration** process; however, *we are all fully US citizens!* The same is true for Jews and Gentiles in Christ; *they are all washed clean by the blood of Jesus, so they are literally holy ones in the sight of God and full members of His family!*
- b. Our foundation is God's Word: As our nation was founded upon our constitution, so our lives in Christ are founded upon the Bible – *having come to us from God through the prophets and the apostles, and being in perfect alignment with Jesus, the Christ!* However, sadly, in a 2017 Gallup poll, only 24% of Americans believe the Bible is the *literal* Word of God, and only 12% among those who are 18 to 29 years old.<sup>1</sup>
- c. No racism or denominations: The family of God is not about division, *but unity!* For all who, *by God's grace*, turn from trust in self to trust in Jesus, *they are all one family in Christ! Let us be thankful; we are included!!!*

**Let Us Pray:** Dear Jesus, thank You for You awesome work to make the way into God's family for each and every one of us!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/210704/record-few-americans-believe-bible-literal-word-god.aspx>