

Life: Connected in Christ

August 21, 2014

• *The Bible Studies for Life* lesson for Sept. 7 focuses on Ephesians 2:17-22.

Introduction

With this lesson, Bible Studies for Life begins a six-week study of the importance and benefits of churchmanship. The central theme is connectedness—being joined to Christ through participation in the body of Christ. This is the central emphasis of the book of Ephesians. In this epistle, the Apostle Paul describes the extraordinary life God designed for his people through the saving work of Christ Jesus.

Connectedness to the body of Christ is vitally important for Christians today. Believers need the encouragement and growth that comes from associating with dedicated followers of Christ. Congregations need the edification and unity that comes from members ministering among one another. Furthermore, Christ desires his people work together serving his kingdom.

We all have access to God through Jesus (Ephesians 2:17-18)

Two verses describe the access all followers of Christ have to God. Verse 18 explains access as the consequence of Christ's atoning work, referenced throughout chapter 2 and described in verse 17. Access to God is a tremendous benefit for the believer, who once was estranged and separated from God.

Verse 17 explains Christ "preached peace," by which he transformed into believers those who responded with faith. In view here is "God's peace," which reflects the believing community's use of the Hebrew word "shalom."

To have a relationship with God is to be at peace with him. This peace is far more than an emotion. It is the status of community, harmony, tranquility, security, wellness, welfare, friendship, agreement, success and prosperity all wrapped up in one package. God offers this abundant peace to all.

Those who respond and commit themselves to him experience the transformation and enduring effects of God's peace. The New Testament uses the word "peace" to describe the blessed results of reconciliation to God (Colossians 1:20).

Christ's preaching brings peace to people "far and near." Christ's preaching extends through human servants, but the activity and effects are attributed to Christ himself. Of great importance is the Greek word underlying "preach." It is the verb form of the word translated as "evangelize." The word means "to proclaim, announce or preach the good news."

Reconciliation and transformation

Sometimes this word is rendered by the single word "preach," but it is vital to understand more meaning is packed into the underlying Greek word than one word in English can convey. The English word "preach" is no longer readily understood to refer to preaching the gospel. Even the concept of gospel is not readily understood. Therefore, it cannot be overstated that the preaching of Christ's gospel brings reconciliation and transformation to those who receive it.

Christ's gospel is powerful. It transforms Jewish people who are near to God, having the benefit of learning from Hebrew Scripture (Romans 3:1-2). It also transforms Gentiles who are far from God, not having Hebrew Scripture.

Verse 18 refers to the access all believers have to the Father. This is the intended consequence of Christ's tremendous life-transforming work on the

cross. Believers have access to God because they are at peace with God. They have been purchased by Christ's great work of redemption and won over by his marvelous demonstration of love (Romans 5:8; Psalm 118:23). Access to the great Almighty is facilitated through the Holy Spirit, that is, his Spirit.

Jesus brings all believers into God's family, the church (Ephesians 2:19)

Verse 19 uses the pronoun "you" because Paul wrote of a status that did not apply to him. Paul was estranged from God, but he was Jewish and therefore conceptually "near" to God. His readers were mostly Gentiles. They were foreigners to the covenant and strangers to its provisions. God did more than bring Paul's readers "near," he closed the distance and made them part of his people.

God's people are those who place their trust in God. He cultivated followers in Israel for centuries. Along with Paul's first readers, we too, if we have received the transforming gospel, experience the benefits of being included among God's people.

The term "household" indicates the collective nature of God's people. There is a rich, domestic life for those who belong to God. Here is a welcome reminder we belong to God's household. We have family chores that should be approached with delight because our outstanding Father leads and provides for us.

Christ, the Foundation and Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20-22)

One could ask how Jewish and Gentile believers find can community. This passage answers that Christ's saving work transforms both so all can be built together in harmony. Jewish and Gentile believers should affirm one another. Each is being built into God's grand-scale temple. The Temple is the Almighty Lord's dwelling place, royal court and throne room. Since his

temple is holy, we too must be holy as the Lord himself is holy (Leviticus 20:26).

God started construction of his temple through the work of his Son and his human servants. Jesus is the chief cornerstone of this great temple. The foundation is the apostles and prophets, the great proclaimers of his gospel message. We must find our place in the remaining architecture, which finds its grounding in this great foundation.

To be connected to God in Christ is the great privilege of all God's people for eternity. It started in our lives inauspiciously, cloaked in mystery to our formerly spiritually blind eyes, but now the advantages of our personal connection to God, the chief of which is peace, are the great experience of every believer.