

Life Group Topic #22 -

WELCOME: (15 minutes)

What is your favourite “summer” food?

WORSHIP: (15 minutes)

Use whatever means possible to turn the group’s attention to the wonder and majesty of our God- including music, prayer, meditation on the Psalms, and other art forms.

WORD APPLICATION: (45 minutes)

Briefly read or paraphrase the following sermon summary before moving to the heart of this section: the discussion around the application questions.

Ephesians 2:11-18

¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)— ¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Alienation is a significant problem - the breakdown and disconnection of relationships resulting in isolation. In the opening verses Paul points out explicitly to Gentiles their alienation from both God and Israel – “excluded...and without God” (v.12).

Jesus is the Peace-maker – Between us and God but also in our human relationships. Where there is division Jesus brings and calls us to reconciliation. This is radical covenantal relationship. When describing this reconciliation Paul says Jesus “made the two one” (v. 14) and again that his purpose was to create “one new man out of the two” (v.15). This is marriage language - this is covenant language. This speaks of those who were once separate and enemies being joined together in the deepest possible unity, no longer defined by their old lives but by their new relationship centered on Jesus. Jesus abolished the divisive law (v. 15) and he created an undivided humanity and now He works reconciliation to bring hostility to an end.

Because reconciliation is a relational word it is both an event that occurred at on the cross but relationships can never be single events therefore it also speaks to an ongoing relationships with God and with each other.

Martyn Lloyd Jones speaks of the 5 parts to reconciliation...

1. It is the change from a hostile to a friendly relationship
2. It means a re-connecting, a re-uniting not just being brought to speaking terms

3. It is not a compromise that provides a momentary solution...it is a complete action that produces harmony where there was once hostility
4. It is not that the two sides decide to come together but rather it is one of the sides that takes the action and it is the upper one who initiates it...so it does not begin mutually, it is initiated by one side.
5. It carried with it the thought that this is a restoration of something that was there before...brought back to where they were.

We are told that we have God has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18).

Disunity among His people has always been a special heartache to God. Jesus has made us a part of a new society that is to be known for peace and reconciliation. Is that happening for you? Some minimal commitments...

- Believe and act as if you have far more in common with other believers than what divides you
- Believe and act as if God has a purpose for bringing us together in this local church
- Believe and act as if love is the most excellent way of living and worshipping together

Application Questions:

Please keep in mind that these questions are meant as catalysts designed to get the group talking about life application.

Is unity or division more prominent within the North American Church?

What about in Abbotsford?

What are some common things we let divide us?

What are some examples of unity?

What do we understand our purpose as a church to be?

Can we be reconciled relationally to people we still disagree with?

WITNESS: (15 minutes)

This section is a vision-casting time designed to get the group strategizing and making concrete plans towards reaching outward to a lost world. Relational outreach always has the goal of ultimately enfolding those we reach into the Life Group.

How does the “ministry of reconciliation” connect to the task of witness?