

Ephesians 2:11-22 Fight Racism with the Gospel

3/4/18

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹² 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.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

(Pastor prays)

Friday, here in Charlotte, was the funeral for the greatest evangelist the world has ever known, and even in his death millions of people heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rightly articulated and clearly explained. Billy Graham preached a gospel of grace that not only saved souls, it changed lives and changed thinking. Jesus doesn't just redeem your soul, He takes command of the whole of who you are.

In 1993, 25 years ago, Billy Graham spoke prophetically when he said that racial and ethnic hostility is the foremost social problem in the world today. But this social problem doesn't need a social program. It needs the cross of Jesus. And the truth that we must embrace is that Christians, with the Gospel of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, have the answer to the world of racism. It's crucifixion. We are born sinners

and, as such, we are born racist. And the truth is that the world sees no possible solution to the race problem. Not us. Our belief in the crucified resurrected Jesus, drives us forward in hope! And it lands us on this passage.

Here in Ephesians 2, Paul takes Jews and Gentiles, we take black, brown and white. He takes us to the cross and to the very nature of the church. We are not a black, brown or white church; we are a church that runs red with the blood of Jesus. When you compare ancient history to recent history, you find out that none of our race issues or ethnic barriers or political ideologies are more inclusive or unrelenting than the separation of the Jews and Gentiles in the Bible.

Jews believed that Gentiles were created to stoke the fires of Hell. Gentiles believed that Jews (or anyone else who wasn't Greek) was ignorant and a barbarian. And yet, God in Christ brought them together. God ordained the death of His son Jesus to reconcile alien people groups to each other in one body in Christ. If the church is the bride of Christ, then Jesus spilled His red blood for an interracial bride. In the passage before us, Paul is making the point that Jesus gives every converted Jew and Gentile a new citizenship. This enabled them to fellowship equally with one another in the church without sacrificing their ethnicity.

And He does the same for His church today. You don't go colorblind when you get saved. Instead, you learn to love color, the color of your brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to be saved from ourselves.

Only the Gospel of Jesus Can Save Us From Ourselves

Let's take direction from what Paul wrote to the diverse church in Ephesus. I will use three "don't's" to fight racism:

Don't Revise History – Redeem it

Let me show you what I mean in vv. 11-12. Paul addresses an ethnic group in the church. They are a part of the church, and he is having them to think back on their history. There is hostility in v. 11. *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.*

Remember when you weren't a Christian and the names you were called? In the text, it's Jews calling Gentiles names and the Gentiles returned the favor. The divide between the Jews and the Gentiles was not a simple one. It was huge and complex, and it ran deep. It was religious, it was cultural, and it was racial. Jews believed that they had the bloodline that went all the way back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And this brought bigotry into the early church. In fact, their ethnic and racial issues were as big or even bigger than the ones we face today. And in v. 12, Paul is telling the Gentiles to forget the bigotry and name-calling for a minute and remember what the Gospel has done for you. Remember what you are redeemed from.

In verse 12 it says, *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.* We would say it like this: you were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and godless. That is a bad history. Paul isn't telling them to look away from it. Or the Jews who would read this letter as well, they were bigoted, harsh, prideful and loveless. This is all before Christ.

Do you know history, our history? Don't look away from it. See it and plunge it into the fountains of Christ's blood. Look at the history of the United States and the racial atrocities and slanted systems, and let that history press you to run to Christ – to the cross.

Look at your personal history. Paul takes us there at the beginning of Chapter 2, verses 1-5. *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—*

Our history slams us into the cross where we drop all our hatred and bigotry. We drop our excuses, we drop our sins, and we cling to the cross of Christ. I'm begging you, as

brothers and sisters in Christ, be careful on Facebook, in conversation, don't revise history – redeem it. Here is another “don't”:

Don't Deny Racism, Reject it

Don't say it doesn't exist. Don't say it's not a part of our culture. Racism affects people and programs and systems. I'm asking you to not *deny* racism, *reject* it.

His second section starts in verse 13 and runs to verse 18. Let me show it to you. Look at verse 13. *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* See the “But now”? You who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. You know what that means? That means that regardless of who you are or what ethnic background, all of the alienation has changed.

Let's read verse 14. *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.* Jesus is our peace. Keep looking at it. He's made us both one. This does not say the Jesus hopes that there will be peace and we will play nice with each other, not that one day we will fully love, respect and fully submit to one another. Notice the present tense in verse 14. This is a present reality. He is our peace. He's made us both one. When we come to Christ and are converted - black, brown, white – the formerly separated races are unified. This means there is a radical change in disposition, your position, rights. There is a change in inclusion and leadership.

In the text, the relationship between Jews and Gentiles is completely changed. I think this has application for black, brown and white people in the church. In Christ, we are already one, we just have to start living like it. Verse 15 tells us that racial unity is a present reality through the Gospel. *(B)y abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,*

Don't tell me that racial harmony and reconciliation is not a Gospel issue. In verse 13 it's the blood of Christ. In verse 14 it's His flesh. (In) Verse 16, *and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.* It reconciles us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing hostility. Notice what Jesus creates in the church when He brings all these different people together: *by abolishing*

the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace. What Jesus has done in verse 15 is create a new entity. This new man in verse 15 means that there must be visible and genuine unity regardless of race or culture.

In the passage, a Jew would still have been a Jew ethnically. A Gentile would still have been a Gentile; but now, because they are in Christ, Christ was greater than their ethnicity. For us, for me, Jesus is greater than my whiteness. But my whiteness is not my deciding norm. Jesus is.

Notice the word “create” in verse 10 and also in verse 15 where Paul says his workmanship – created in Christ Jesus. Verse 15 says that God in Christ has created one new man in place of two. It’s important to see what Christ has done and what He has not done with the church. Jesus did not amalgamate one group into another. He didn’t tell the Gentiles that they had to become more Jewish to become Christians or church members.

I think I can apply this to Hickory Grove. We must press against making so-called “white culture” or any one culture the pre-requisite of being part of the body. In Christ, God creates one new people who are reconciled to each other across racial barriers. You are not strangers, not aliens, no enmity, complete trust, radical love. You are not far off but are brought near by Christ and His atoning death on the cross. As Christians discussing race, we must never lose our faith in the “efficacy” of the cross. What I mean is that the power of Jesus to save sinners is the same power to reject racism. The blood that saves people is the blood that unites people. It’s through the cross. We don’t revise history, we redeem it. We don’t deny racism, we reject it.

We Don’t Resent Unity – We Run To It

Verses 19-21 start with the phrase “so then” as if to say, here is the result going forward. *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.* Verse 19 has four statements of unity in Christ – two negative and two positive.

- No longer strangers. A tolerated person who might be here for awhile but will hopefully be gone soon. A clear outsider.
- No longer aliens. Live here but don't really feel like they belong. Not your people.
- Fellow citizens. Complete opposite of foreigner. This is your home town. Your people.
- Members of the household of God. Household like blood relative. Related. You can disagree, but you can't really disown. Father, mother, son, daughter, brother sister.

Now let me point out to you the one hope. Its right there in verse 20-21. *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*

Christ is the cornerstone that holds us together. He drives us to love and keeps us listening, talking, trying and praying so that the world can look at Hickory Grove, a diverse body of believers who have one thing in common. Jesus Christ died for us to reconcile us to God and to one another.

D.A. Carson said the church is made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs or anything else of that sort. Christians come together because they have all been saved by Jesus Christ. They are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus' sake through the power of the cross.

Pray for someone of another race today or have them in your home. Come to the cross of Jesus.

(Pastor prays)