

Becoming Who We Are: *Under One Roof*

Ephesians 2:11-22

Yusufu Turaki, a Christian scholar and author in Nigeria, tells the story of a man from a rural tribe who had met an evangelist and become a Christian. After a while, this new believer had an opportunity to visit a town with his evangelist friend, and, for the first time in his life, to go to a church. But, when he walked into the church, he was shocked when he saw people from a neighboring tribe that his tribe hated, a tribe that had killed some of his friends and family members. He angrily said, “What are those people doing in a church? They are dogs. Their people are killers. I will not be seen with them.”

But, his friend told the man, “Then, you have not yet understood why Jesus died. He died so that they might be in his church. And, he died so that you might be in his church. When you are in his church, you and they are in it only because of his mercy. Jesus gave his life to bring us all into one tribe with one Heavenly Father. So, if you cannot learn to love your new brothers, then you do not yet love your Heavenly Father.”

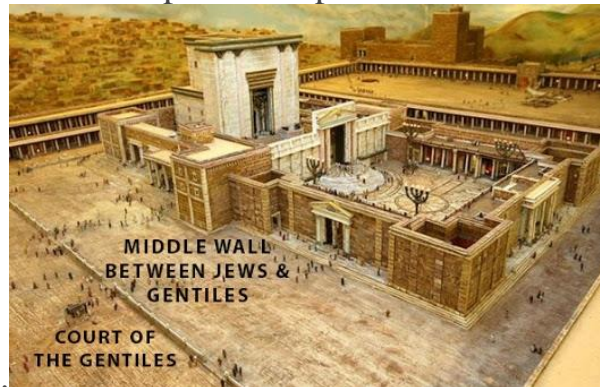
#1: The “Dividing Wall” Back Then ...*the dividing wall of hostility*... (2:14)

I remembered that story from Nigeria as I read again our passage of the day, Eph 2:11-22. Throughout our study in Ephesians, we have been seeing that Paul spoke about two different kinds of ethnic groups coming by faith in Jesus into the church in the city of Ephesus, i.e., Jew and non-Jew. In last week’s passage, Eph 2:1-10, the Apostle Paul talked about there being a wall between all people and God that needs to come down. Do you remember that? He said that all people are dead to God because of our transgressions and sins, But God, because of his great love, has found a way to make us alive to him; i.e., by his grace through faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus tears down the wall between people and God.

But, the problem is that, even though the wall between God and people comes down when we place our faith in Jesus, the walls between people and people often remain intact. That brings us to Eph 2:11-22. **The point the Bible makes in our text today is that God’s grace through faith in Jesus is not only saving grace but also uniting grace!** In our text today, God’s Word takes on this matter of the relationship of people within the church to one another. **Look at two phrases, one in v. 14 and the other in v. 16:**

- “*Christ has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility*... (2:14)”
- “*Christ put to death their hostility* (2:16).”

Don't miss that word "hostility"? It's a strong word that occurs twice. It's a word that refers to hatred among enemies. The "wall of hostility" in v. 14 was a wall that stood in the 1st C. Temple that separated the Court of the Gentiles from



the rest of the temple.

It was a wall that kept Gentiles out of the important places of meeting God. On that wall there was an inscription, called the **Thanatos Inscription**, written in both Greek and Latin forbidding non-Jews to enter. This is what it said:

No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have only himself to blame for his ensuing death.



And, this hostility had spewed out into their regular teaching in the synagogues and Temple. Some rabbis taught that God created Gentiles only to be fuel for hell. Others said that it is immoral to help a Gentile woman give birth to a child because it would bring another heathen into the world.

So, can you imagine a young Jewish couple hearing the Gospel and believing in Jesus. They tell their families about this and, although the families might be able to accept them following this Jesus and say, "On one hand, it's not the best. But, on the other hand, at least he was Jewish." But, then – what would the families

think if they heard that their children and grandchildren were worshipping with Gentiles?

And this hostility was not a one-way street. It was not just that Jewish people were hostile toward Gentiles. No, believe me, anti-Semitism was alive and vibrant in the 1st C just as much as it has remained alive throughout the centuries. All this is to say that one of the most difficult realities for 1st C followers of Jesus to come to grips with was that Jew and Gentile were now in one family, by the eternal plan of God and the work of Christ. How would God break that wall of hatred and hostility down?

#2: How God Breaks Down Walls -- *Through the cross, God put to death their hostility (1:16).*

In 2:11-13, Paul spoke specifically to the Gentiles about what God had done for them. He said that before Jesus came, they didn't even have God's Word. They didn't know what God's moral law required of them. They were, "*Without hope and without God in the world (2:12).*" But, 2:13 is hope-filled: "*But now... in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near...*" How? - "*through the blood of Christ (2:13).*"

But it wasn't just the Gentiles. The Jews did have the Scriptures. They knew God's moral law. But, they had a problem too. They couldn't keep the law. They had all had fallen short. Therefore, they too were without hope. So, what were they to do? In **v. 15**, we get the answer. "*Jesus set aside in his flesh the law with its commandments and requirements.*" Jesus lived the life the law required by living a sinless life and then offered his life on behalf of those who have sinned. This changed everything – for everyone. Now, we who have failed – Jew and Gentile – can have peace with God. Get ready to say hallelujah as I read 2:17-18: *Jesus came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

With that beautiful declaration, we learn that when we place our faith in Christ, we experience 1) that the walls between us and God come down and, at the same time, 2) that the walls between us and our brothers and sisters in Christ come down too. Look at what he says in **v. 14-16**:

* *Jesus is our peace. He destroyed the wall of hostility... (2:14)*

* *Jesus's purpose was to create in himself one new man humanity out of the two, thus making peace (2:15).*

* *Through Jesus both Jew and Gentile have access to the Father by one Spirit (2:18).*

In one of the most in-your-face passages in the Bible, we read, “Brothers and sisters in Christ: No more walls between you! No more arrogant pride. No more shunning one another!” In other words, when we respond God’s offer of mercy and receive Jesus as Savior, we dare no longer have hostility toward another believer. As we saw in last week’s text, Eph. 2:1-3, i.e., the only thing that would cause us to be broken from another believer and to refuse reconciliation is pride; i.e., the feeling that “I’m better than that other person or group”. Or, thinking that “they have done unforgivable things and I never have.” But, a genuine Christian cannot think those things -- Right? We were all dead and enslaved and condemned (2:1-3). We’re all only in God’s family by grace... so, in God’s family, there is no boasting! No boasting -- and, no walls!

So, what had to happen that these walls of hostility would come down? 1) God had to deal with the sins, transgressions and injustices in all people’s lives. So, Jesus came into this world and bore the punishment necessary because of our sins so that we might be right with God. And, 2) on a practical level, the ongoing sins of hostility toward people that existed in the church in Ephesus had to be identified, called out specifically, and repented of. And, the same thing continues to be true in day.

What I’m saying today is that, today, do not be surprised if you sense there is still some hostility that exists in your relationships to people. In fact, as you grow in your walk with God, you’ll find he opens your eyes to places where you need to seek reconciliation with people from whom you are broken. When that happens, do not close your eyes to it. Do what Paul did in Eph 2:11-22, i.e., identify where you have walls of hostility in your life, call them out for what they are, and then take steps toward peace. We will be seeing much, much more about how to do this in the passages we will be coming to in Ephesians. But, now, let’s let Eph 2:19-22 guide our thinking and practice about being a people with no walls of hostility.

#3: Becoming Who We Are – One household living out the peace of Christ. *Consequently...* (3:19).

“Consequently...” That’s how this next part of God’s Word begins. Jesus gave his life to make peace between us as sinners and God. Jesus gave his life to tear down any hostility that might exist in our hearts toward one another --

“Consequently!!” In the next few verses, the Bible begins to tell us how the way we live as one unexpected family with no walls of hostility makes God’s glory known to the world. In 2:14-18, Paul used two metaphors to describe our oneness in Christ, i.e., one new humanity (2:15) and one body (2:16). In 2:19-22, Paul used two more metaphors to tell us the consequences of us placing our faith in the crucified Jesus. He said, “Jesus died to make peace... Consequently”:

1. We become “fellow citizens with God’s people”.

Before coming to Christ, we were, according to the Bible “*foreigners and aliens.*” Oh, both the Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus were members of some nation – just as we are here today. But, those kinds of citizenships do not last forever, do they? What the Bible is saying is that apart from Christ, we do not know the eternal king over all kingdoms. Using Paul’s language, we were aliens with respect to God and his eternal kingdom. Alienation is a word most of us understand we understand well. A sense of alienation is the root cause of hatred among nations and of racial strife. It’s that deep sense that we really don’t belong. But, the King over all kings declares, “In Christ, you are a citizen of my kingdom with all the rights of citizenship. You are a fellow citizen with all my people.” In other words, when you come to Christ, you become a part of a people with whom you belong -- never again an alien. You belong forever with God’s people to God’s kingdom.

2. We become “fellow members of God’s household”.

This is a much more intimate description of our relationship to God and to one another. The church of Jesus Christ is not just a place where our God is the king over all kings or president over all presidents. No, God is our Father when we’re Christians. We’re not just citizens – we’re God’s children. Together with people from every tribe, language and nation, we form the household of God. Again, this shouts out that when we come to Jesus, we have a people and place of belonging. **I think that one of the biggest challenges for a church family that has a worship center as big as this one is to help all of us really experience that we belong here.** We all have to work hard to make sure that we nurture that kind of belonging here that Jesus died to bring about.

Did you notice that Paul first said we become members of God’s household in v. 19 and then moved to the idea of us together being a household building, i.e., a place where the household meets, and God dwells in 2:20-22? He was saying that, when this unexpected, diverse but unified family meets and worships together, we should experience God’s presence – and, at the same time, the world should see that God dwells here.

I know that when you read all this language about us being one body, one new humanity, one citizenship and one household of faith, you might get the idea that, when we come to Christ, we begin to lose all uniqueness, all the distinctiveness, with which God has created us. It is indeed, this often happens in the world when we try to bring about oneness, i.e., we try to bring about equality by making everyone the same. Do you remember the NBC television show, *Community*, filmed down at the LA Community College but about a fictional school called the

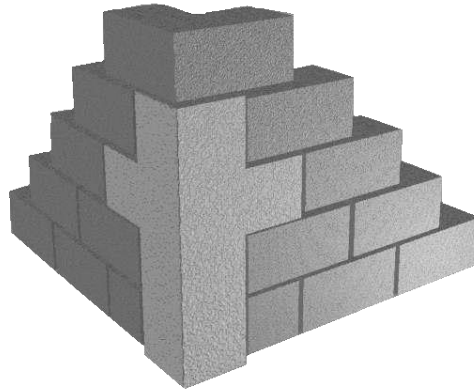
Greendale Community College? At that school, the Dean applied every aspect of “political correctness” to his school. By that, I mean he so much wanted equality among people so much that he didn’t even want their school mascot to have any distinguishing traits. He called their sports teams, “The Greendale Human Beings”



and had this as their mascot:

But, that’s not how God works. I really love this about the gospel. God doesn’t make us one by making us uniform. Men remain men and women remain women – but we are one in our standing before God and in the church. We also retain our skin color, our distinctive and God-given personalities, and our family names. But what God does is that he brings us all together into a new and all transcending identity in Christ.

Jesus is the heart of all this. He is the cornerstone of this new household (2:20). The cornerstone was the 1st stone set in the construction of a masonry



foundation in ancient buildings.

The cornerstone was the principal stone placed at the corner of the building *with all other stones being set in alignment with this stone. What the Bible is saying is that, what aligns all of our lives is that we follow Jesus and become more like Jesus. When we do live in unity, growing together to be more and more like Jesus, then the world will know that God dwells here at Lake Avenue Church. “In Christ, you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (2:22).”*

Let’s bring all of this home to us here at LAC right now. Let me remind you of the commitment we have made as a church to becoming the kind of church the Bible describes in our passage this week. Based on this text, Ephesians 2:11-22, we state that we are committed to the **core value of “Kingdom Community”**:

Reflecting God’s family in the church, we are unified across cultural, generational, socio-economic and racial/ethnic differences.

So, among many kinds of walls of hostility that existed in the Ephesian Church, it is clear that the most formidable was the Jew/Gentile wall. What do you think is the most formidable wall we face in our world? I have asked that of dozens of LAC people this week – and **each person quickly gave me the same answer, i.e., bringing the divisions we see in our nation’s political arena into the life of our church family.**

As I watched the hearing related to our Supreme Court playing out with such hostility, I began to do what the Bible commands us to do, i.e., to pray for our leaders, especially for our US Senators this week. I’ve prayed that God would give them wisdom, sound minds and an understanding of what is good and just.

And, I’ve prayed for us here at LAC, that God would enable us to walk through this time, not in uniformity, but in unity. I’ve prayed that we will be able to discuss political matters respectfully and pray for our leaders together. I’ve prayed that not one of us would say, “I will not worship in the same household of faith

with people who disagree with me about political matters.” We cannot have in our church family the kind of hostility we’ve seen in Washington, DC. We have a higher citizenship brought about by the blood of Christ.

And, I need to call another matter out too. Almost all of us have some walls in our personal relationships. Sometimes, they are walls passed down to us by things in the past. Others are walls we’ve built ourselves. So, in response to God’s Word today, I ask you to allow the Spirit of God to help you search your heart right now. **Here is my question for you: What wall in your relationships would you ask God to tear down today?** Now, beware -- When you ask that question, you should know that God will almost certainly ask you to take the first step toward peace. And, he will ask you to take that step with humility. He will ask you to search your heart and be sure you want, not so much to win the battle, but that the best will happen for the other person or group.

Remember that to bring things back together, Jesus had to break down some walls – pride, hostility, grudges, etc. Some of your personal walls of hostility may have to be broken if there will be peace. There may be some hard places in your own heart that God will have to break down. You will have to be ready to forgive and to receive forgiveness.

But, when you humble your heart and seek peace with someone else in obedience to God’s Word, you can be assured that God will be pleased. And, in God’s time, you will begin to see God do more than you could ask, think or even imagine. As walls begin to come down, you and the world that watches will know that you – and we – are “*a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit* (2:22).”