

A Series on Ephesians
“New Inclusive Community” (Ephesians 2:11-20)
March 28, 2010
by Kevin Haah



I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

We are in the middle of a series on the Letter to Ephesians.

Let's read Ephesians 2:11-22.

Therefore, 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.¹³ But 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,¹⁵ by 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,¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Paul has been talking about how he has chosen us, adopted us, revealed mysteries to us, redeemed us, given us the Holy Spirit; how he took us to death to life, all by grace through faith; and that has led us to the work of grace. He's been talking about how broken people are transformed in through grace. It's great stuff.

But, from 2:11ff, Paul makes a slight shift in his focus. He says that Jesus didn't just bring reconciliation between God and us, but also between people. Not just vertical reconciliation, but also horizontal reconciliation.

This passage tells us (1) that Jesus died to bring all kinds of people into a new humanity, a new community; (2) what the cause of our failure to get along with people who are different is; and (3) how the cross brings us together into this new community.

II. First, this passage tells us that Jesus died to bring all kinds of people into a new humanity, a new community.

Verse 14-16 say:

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.

In 2:1-10, Paul has said that the first purpose of the cross is to take us from death to life. It is to transform broken people by grace through faith leading to work. I think we like to hear this. We like stuff that's going to change us. We tend to be individualistic, and this stuff right along. I want God to change me.

But, now Paul is saying that the second purpose of the cross to create a new humanity ("create in himself one new man out of two"), and create a new community—this body, this God's household, family, this building--of people who didn't get along before. This means that God's plan is not individualistic. It is communal. His purpose is to create a new community where people who are different, people from different ethnicities, people from different socio-economics, people from different style, people from different background, people from different neighborhoods come together and do community together—be family together, be a body together, be a building together.

That's one of the reasons Jesus died. He died to bring us together as one. Isn't that what the passage said: "His purpose was the create one new man (or humanity) ... one body...through the cross." Are we taking this purpose seriously? Do you crave being a part of a reconciling community where people who would not otherwise come together as one are coming together? That's the vision of this church. That's one of the key reasons why we are here. Our vision statement says: our vision is to "be an inclusive, gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ."

- We want to be a community where all kinds of people, African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, Anglos come together breaking the barriers that divide us.
- We want to be a community where liberals and conservatives can come together breaking the barriers that divide us.
- We want to be a community where people in skid row and people living the lofts come together breaking the barriers that divide us.
- We want to be a community where people who are morally conservative and people who are morally liberal come together breaking the barriers that divide us. Just like the Jews and the Gentiles came together.

We will frustrate the purpose for which he died if you just focus on your spiritual growth and transformation without becoming a part of developing an inclusive gospel-centered community. Jesus is saying such community is possible. He wants to create a community where economic relationships, family relationships, gender relationships, racial relationships ACTUALLY work. Are you committed to seeing that happen? Are you committed to doing it?

When Jesus prayed right before he was arrested, did you know that he prayed for you and me directly? It's the only place where Jesus is actually praying for you and me. In [John 17:20-23](#):

²⁰"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message (that's you and me), ²¹that all of them may be one (he knew people from all different backgrounds will believe in him and he prays that they may be one), Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let (it's actually a hina clause here—it is better translate as "so that") the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

He is saying that if we unite as one, and combining this with Ephesians, if we become a new community, a body of Christ, united and functioning the way we are supposed to function, THEN, the world will know that Jesus is the savior of the world!

We've got to hunger for this to happen. You've got to make this an important part of your church experience. Don't come to church just looking for a great worship time, or even a decent sermon. Let's go beyond that. Let's come together to create a new community of people who were enemies coming together as brothers and sisters, where people you didn't feel comfortable with becomes your accountability partner, a disciple, where a person you would otherwise look down upon becomes your mentor. Where it is an upside down Kingdom.

But, this is hard stuff. Racism is hard stuff. Classism is hard to deal with. What God is doing here is absolutely beautiful! But, it's not easy. There is some discomfort.

III. So, let's go to the second question: what is the root cause of our failure to get along with people who are different than us?

Paul's immediate situation is the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. That's the difficult relationship. So, he uses them as illustration to demonstrate how the cross destroyed the barrier between them. Paul says that the thing the cause the division between Jews and Gentiles are the law with its commandments and regulations. How is that? What does that mean? The law in of themselves is not bad, but the law combined with our sinful nature has a tendency to trap us. The law is basically a system of performance. If you perform, you are righteous or approved. If you don't perform, you are not righteous or approved. The Jewish regulations had intricate system of determining what made you approved. It's like a pecking order of our worth and it is based on our performance of the commandments and regulation. And we all want to be on the top of the pecking order. And sometimes, the only way to be on the top is to push others down, and sometimes we used race, culture, unfamiliarity, success, money, and stuff like that to determine value or worth of someone.

So, in a way, the root cause of racism is our need to feel superior because we have a need to feel superior. Why? Because our hearts are selfish and hungry for affirmation because we have built our house on the law.

IV. Now, how we does the cross change all that? How we do stop being racist, classist, etc?

In verse 16, the Bible says that it is through the cross that the hostility is put to death. What does that mean? I know the cross saves us; but how does the cross free us from racism?

Here's how: the cross utterly changes the way you look at yourself. And as a result, it changes the way you look at other people.

One, it tells you that you are so loved that he was willing to die for you. You are created in God's image. You are valuable to God. You are his treasure.

Two, the cross tells you that you really screwed up. It tells you that you were once far away. Your culture is screwed up as well. The gospel of the cross should give us a healthy suspicion of our culture, of our nationalism, of our political perspectives. You must start to see the influences of sin in your culture. (Everyone has a culture. I find it interesting that we talk about African American culture, Asian culture, Latino culture but we don't talk about Caucasian culture; let's not make the mistake of thinking that there is no a Caucasian culture; I think when we do that, we are assuming that it is the standard by which we judge all culture; that's ethnocentric). If you don't see the sin in your culture, you will harshly judge the sin in other cultures.

Three, the cross tells us that God has given me a new identity that is not based on the law, on my performance, but on grace. He has adopted me as his child. Because I stand on grace, and not on the law, the pride, nationalistic pride, or racial pride, does not control us. We can have a healthy attitude about our racial identity, but it is never something that needs to define us as superior to others. Essentially, we stop getting life from feeling superior to others, we get our life from Jesus, from the new identity he's given us, the love he gives us.

When I turned 16, for the first time in my life, I had a birthday party with all of my friends. I had friends in the marching band of mostly geeky non-Korean guys. I had Korean-Korean friends from school. I had Korean-American friends from church youth group. Without thinking, I invited them all. It was one of the most awkward time of my life. I had no idea who to be. I realized that I acted differently with each kind of friends. After this party, I started an identity crisis. Who am I? Am I a Korean? Am I a Korean-American? Am I just an American? I acted differently based who I was hanging out with. I kept asking myself which was the real Kevin Haah. Am I faking with one?

When people used to tell me to just be yourself, I used to think, which one? I had no idea what that meant.

I started to resolve this issue when I went on a mission trip to Dominican Republic and during the cross-cultural training, I learned that culture is not a zero sum game—in that if I become more American, it does not mean I become less Korean. I can be both. Just like Paul who said, “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.”

And the final clincher is this: when we know who we are (absolutely based on his grace) that we are his child, we don't mind changing for other people. Paul knew exactly who he was because he built his identity on the cross. When we do that, we can become flexible people. We can change and do some crazy things to make people feel more comfortable. We can even become uncomfortable for the sake of other's comfort. That's love gospel-centered style. Do you see how the gospel of the cross can actually change the way you relate to people who are different than you?