

Sermon Follow-up | May 17, 2020

21 Letters — Paul's Priorities: Dealing with Differences

Focus Passage: Ephesians 2:11–21

Additional Context for Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:1-16

Corollary Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1-31

Other Passages Referenced: Ephesians 4:31–32

Sermon Recap: In Ephesians 2, Paul writes to Jewish and Gentile believers who had spent their whole lives looking down on each other before they came to faith in Jesus. In the Jewish temple, there was a physical wall separating Jews from Gentiles and culturally there were many figurative walls of hostility. We tend to build walls between ourselves and those different from us. We often assign moral values to those differences that elevate ourselves and diminish those who are different, declaring them to be “wrong”, “bad”, or “dumb”. More than disagreeing, we see people berating those who are different. Paul declares that on the cross, Jesus defeated those dividing hostilities by reconciling Jews and Gentiles first to God and, in the process, to one another. The need for reconciliation recognizes that the relationships were broken for each group; both needed to be saved. Using the imagery of the temple wall, Paul says Jesus not only tore down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, but the Spirit is uniting those two very different groups to form one new temple where God dwells. Are you building walls of hostility with those who are deeply different than you, or are you being built up in bonds of peace with them as a result of your common reconciled relationship with God?

Introductory Comments

- The material needs for food and basic necessities continue to tax the supply available at our mission partners. If you are in a position to help with time or finances, please check out these opportunities — <http://wcchapel.org/provide-help/>. If you were not online for the Digital Foyer, I encourage you to watch the brief video about the House of Mercy and how volunteers can help out there — <https://www.facebook.com/wcchapel757/videos/240382860554652/>

Study Helps

- I encourage you to check out the Bible Project on the Book of Ephesians in the Further Resources section below.
- Paul likely wrote Ephesians sometime between A.D. 57–62 while imprisoned, either in Caesarea or in Rome. Ephesians is one of Paul's four “prison epistles”. Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians are the others.
- Paul's letter to the Ephesians exalts God's grace and sovereign power to reunite Jews and Gentiles as the people of God. Their faith in Jesus' work to redeem them brings salvation and unity to both groups. The overall theme deals with unity in the church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers were to demonstrate that unity by their love for one another; Paul used a form of love (*agape*) 19 times in the letter.
- The city of Ephesus was located in southern Asia, in what is modern-day Turkey. Paul spent significant time there working with the church and we can read about some of his experiences there in the Book of Acts, chapters 18–21.
- Ephesians 2:15 mentions Jesus “abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.” It is helpful to understand this verse in light of Matthew 5:17 where Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Paul was likely saying that the Law

was fulfilled in Jesus which meant Gentiles and Jews could be in a restored relationship with God, not based on their keeping commandments but on Christ's fulfillment of the Law on their behalf.

Group ~~Gathering~~ Interaction

Connect: Making Honest Connections with One Another (Pick one)

1. Please share briefly one of the following:
 - a. How do you feel about the prospect of gathering again as a congregation for Sunday morning worship?
 - b. What has God been saying to you through His word, the sermon, or other people?

Grow: Listening to and Learning from God's Word

Read Ephesians 2:11–21

1. In verses 11–12, Paul describes the condition of the “uncircumcised” Gentiles before coming to faith in Christ. List the characteristics Paul uses to describe their pre-Christian status.

2. How did the status of the Gentiles in relation to God change as a result of their faith in Jesus?

3. In Ephesians 2:14–16, who does Paul say is reconciled to whom?

Serve: Serving King Jesus and Others, By Living Out and Letting Others Know God's Word

1. As you look at our culture and world today, what do you believe are some of the biggest “walls” dividing people? How could you see the gospel reconciling those divisions?
2. Read Ephesians 4:29–32 and reflect on how you're doing in obeying Paul's commands, particularly with reference to people who are deeply different than you.
3. Can you recall a time when you were treated unfairly because you were seen as different from the majority? How did it make you feel? And how can you take that experience and use it to put God's love on display with people who are different or hostile to you?

Further Resources

- Bible Project –
 - Ephesians – <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/181310?episode=55>
- Illustrations and quotes from the sermon can be found on the “Sermon Slides” link at the bottom of www.wcchapel.org