

Diversity - Mark of the Kingdom Ephesians 2 vs 11-22

Galatians 3 vs 28(slide)

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We have had a Gal 3vs 28 group meeting for some time now desiring to see Heritage truly embracing our diversity and breaking down walls of prejudice that separate us. Today's message reflects something of the journey we are on and we are looking forward to presenting opportunities for our community to step in the days ahead.

Prayer

Ephesians 2 vs 11-22(slide)

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)— ¹² remember 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 by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in 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.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his 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.

1. Before the cross– Prejudice (vs 11-12). (slide)

“at that time” (12)

In Vs 14 Paul called it a barrier, a dividing wall of hostility. The mosaic law with its commands and ordinances had separated Israel from other nations (Jew and gentile). In the temple was a physical barrier. Outer court for gentiles and inner court for Jews. Along the top of the barrier of the dividing wall, at regular intervals, were stone pillars bearing an inscription engraved in both Latin and Greek...

“Let no one of any other nation come within the fence and barrier around the Holy Place. Whoever is caught doing so will himself be responsible for the fact that his death will ensue.”

The Roman government gave the Jews permission to execute any Gentile if they proceeded beyond this barrier.

And so, before the cross the world lived by different labels that ensured separation and division and, outside of the cross, it still does today. These labels have given rise to destructive forces of prejudice of which racism is an example

The moment I have the thought that I am superior, more valuable, or of greater worth than another human being because of my race I am being racist.

Any thought of being superior for whatever reason makes me guilty of prejudice. Which one of us has never had these thoughts?

The Jews had used their religious distinctiveness as a tool for racism and prejudice.

The Pharisee would pray each morning,

“I thank Thee, God, that I am a Jew, not a Gentile; a man, not a woman; and a freeman, and not a slave.” Did you notice what Gal 3 vs 28 says?

The Greeks and Jews were separated by seemingly insurmountable racial and religious barriers. To label someone as uncircumcised means to designate somebody as not being a Jew and, therefore, outside of the promises of God.

The Greek looked down on slaves and barbarians and Scythian. The Greek was the aristocrat of the Roman world and lauded it over anyone who was not Greek in his culture.

The Jew looked down on the Gentile. Jews refused to enter a Gentile house, Even the apostles were reluctant to accept Gentiles as equal partners in the church.

Regardless of the level of culture or civilization, each ethnic group seems to be able to point to some other group or things in that group that make them uncivilized or inferior. There is no ultimate answer to race problems because of the state of the human heart. We can legislate rights, but we cannot legislate the heart. In the Devil's world there is no solution to the inequalities of life. There never will be an ultimate solution to the social and racial prejudice except, as we will see, through the gospel.

Diagram of BC (slide)

This side of the cross

We look at each other through the lens of these labels. The labels that cause prejudice to thrive. We use the labels to make a case for our own superiority or inferiority

When I see you, I pre-judge you based on:

- Skin tone
- Race
- Clothing
- Culture
- Religious practices
- Gender
- Political party
- Sport
- Education
- Possessions

I believe I am of greater value and worth to you because...fill in the blank...my skin tone (colored guy in SA about whites being colored), where I was born, what family I was born in to , my intelligence, my education, my job, my political preference, my possessions, my religion, my hobbies, my gender, my religious practices...Its these filling the blank beliefs that have fueled prejudice created dividing walls(whole systems have been created- slavery in US, Caste system in India, Apartheid system in SA, Hitler – Arian race, Arabs with African in N Africa, small and large these systems are in every country and people group) and cause chaos and untold damage to mankind.

This was the accepted state of the world...until Jesus came and introduced the kingdom of God climaxed at the cross where suddenly the walls that divide us were obliterated.

2. At the cross– Abolition of prejudice (vs 13-17) (slide)

“but now” (13)

Did you notice how Jesus came?

Philippians 2 vs 7-8 (slide)

**rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.**

**⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!**

I discover Jesus who chose to become everything that defines inferiority. He carried all those labels. Born into poverty and an oppressed, minority group. Isaiah 53 tells me that He was despised, rejected, oppressed, afflicted, held in low esteem, like one from whom people hide their faces. Talk about racism and prejudice, He faced it all.

Becomes the object of prejudice.
In so doing two things are destroyed:

1. The wall separating me from God (slide)

Matthew 27 vs 51(slide)

⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

At the cross the dividing wall of sin that separated me from God was destroyed
My journey as a minister of reconciliation, free of prejudice, has to begin right there. Jesus did that for me not because of my race, family, skin tone education, political persuasion. He did it because he sees me as God's beloved made in His image. You have to grasp this for yourself because that will change everything.

2. The wall that separates humans from each other (slide)

Jesus sets aside national, religious, cultural and social distinctions. God's Word says that there is one place where everyone is equal and that is at the foot of the cross.

Col 3 vs 11 (slide)

¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

No is the Greek word ou signifying absolute negation. In other words, "There absolutely does not exist..." is the force of this statement.

These distinctions all vanish when we come to Christ; we are one in him, and every promise to believers is good to all who are in Christ Jesus, for "Christ is all, and in all."

Lightfoot - "Not only does the distinction not exist, but it cannot exist."

All distinctions that fuel racism and prejudice are abolished at the cross.

NATIONAL/racist DISTINCTIONS ARE ABOLISHED IN CHRIST. (slide)

"Greek and Jew." The peculiar privilege of Abraham's natural seed is gone. Mercy is shown on exactly similar terms to Jew and to Gentile.

"Barbarian, Scythian." The barbarian was the foreigner, the Scythian the savage.

Barbarian – foreign, uncultured, weird

Barbarian - strictly means stammering, stuttering or uttering unintelligible sounds and so was used to describe strange speech or foreign language. The Greeks used the word of any foreigner ignorant of the Greek language and the Greek culture, whether mental or moral, with the added notion after the Persian war, of rudeness and brutality. When someone spoke in another language, it sounded to the Greeks like “bar-bar-bar,” or unintelligible chatter.

Scythian

More barbarous than the barbarians.

The climax of barbarity

little better than wild beasts – Josephus

And so, as you can imagine a fellowship composed of all the people groups mentioned in this verse was unthinkable in the ancient world. Yet that is precisely what happened in the church. Christ demolished the racial barriers separating men. The gospel turns all of these into brothers and sisters.

RITUALISTIC DISTINCTIONS ARE ABOLISHED.

"Circumcision and uncircumcision." Some Jewish believers in Galatia would have imposed circumcision on the Gentile Christians, but neither circumcision nor the want of it availed anything in Christ's kingdom, but "a new creation"

SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS ARE ABOLISHED. "Bondman, freeman." The gospel has placed them on one level of religious privilege.

NOTE: All these distinctions have been made by man where one is seen as superior to the other.

CHRIST HAS OBLITERATED ALL THESE DISTINCTIONS at the cross

AC diagram (slide)

Christ is all things and in all things. Christ has dispossessed and obliterated all distinctions. Christ has substituted Himself for all these; Christ occupies the whole sphere of human life. He has obliterated the labels.

So now, when I face the cross everything that separates me, that makes me feel superior or inferior has disappeared. The uneducated gypsy woman living on a rubbish dump in Cairo or no different in value and worth than the queen of England. That is the revolution that the cross brought and can be found nowhere else. Have you experienced the cross? Has it changed the way you see yourself and others?

3. AD- After the cross– Image of God (18-22) (slide) “consequently” (19)

Galatians 3 vs 28 (slide) ²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Everything is gone. Does it mean we are all the same?

Pictures of animals (slides)

No, I am still White/SA/ strange accent...but now our diversity is celebrated as a reflection of the glory of our creative God rather than a tool to be used to divide. Acmal (Uzbek) – Andy (South African) different in every way (dress, traditions, values, skin tone, food, sport, language, accent) but when I look at Him that's not what I see is someone clothed with Christ, he is my brother, we are one, completely equal in value and worth to God. He has not become Sa and I have not become Uzbek, but Christ is all and in all.

Uzbeks always asked me who I was... South African...not possible, you are not black (the black American guy teaching with me). They have ethnicity in their passports. I ask them what Adam and Eve were cause that's what I am. I am a white English, German, South African man, Irish passport, living in America...what does that make me? Why are Muslims persecuted for turning to Jesus? Giving up your identity...traitor...such an irony and a lie. You are becoming more Uzbek than you ever were because now you are in Him. I am a son of Adam, same Father, same citizenship.

Apply that scenario to any of these labels

Everything that relates to superiority cannot exist in the kingdom of God. We are all one in Christ...no distinctions, no barriers, no superiority. We are in the same side (Buckeyes, world cup)

One Family

One Citizenship

One Father

Sons of Adam and daughters of Eve

AD diagram (slide)

So, when I look at my fellow believer I see no distinction. Rather I see us reflecting the glory of our creative God

When I look back at Humanity through the cross, I see them as Christ does. Not through a set of labels but human beings made in God's image and therefore of great value and worth.

Heritage

Russian, Chinese, Asian, Latino, Sudanese, Egyptian Syrian, Indian, South African, Srilankan, Philippine's, Bridge.

4. Understanding identity (slide)

How do I live like this?

The Greek/roman, barbarian, Scythian when he is converted, becomes a new being, with a new citizenship, a new allegiance. Now he is not so much a Greek but is in fact a Christian. The result is a unity in one body with One Head, Christ Jesus.

Who are you? What defines you? What factors do you use to determine your identity? These labels? How you answer this question is critical to this whole discussion. Where I was born, my sex, my skin tone, where I live now, my faith. As long as I allow the labels to determine my own value and worth I will be a both a perpetrator and victim of racism and prejudice.

Zim prof (uneducated unbeliever K)

Conclusion

As a son of Adam., daughter of Eve, you are a Child of the King. With this identity I now follow the example of my King and build bridges instead of walls. It was His ministry and is now given to us.

As a child who knows who I am I live in the exact opposite spirit of racism and prejudice

Philippians 2³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, (slide)

There's our test right there

1. Lord please remove any dividing wall with you. Thank you for what Jesus did for me on the cross to reconcile me to you.
2. Lord please remove the dividing walls I have in my heart towards others
Please reveal any sign of prejudice, racism in my heart towards anyone that I may repent and walk with an undivided heart.
3. Lord give me a heart that values others as better than myself.
4. Lord, help me to be a minister of reconciliation as you lead me by your Spirit.
- 5. What practical step can I take this week? (slide)**