

LIFE GROUP LESSON

Hot Topics— Study of Ephesians • Week of September 13

Introduction

- What walls do we build?

Some walls are good. We read in Scripture about David and his men being a wall of protection around shepherds and their herds in the wilderness of Maon (1Samuel 25:15-16). We read about Nehemiah leaving the courts of Artaxerxes and making the trek to Judah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem that lay in ruins (Nehemiah 2:7-8). In the Book of Revelation, we read how the Spirit takes John “to a great high mountain” and shows him “the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. It shown with the glory of God and sparkled like a precious stone—like jasper as clear as crystal. The city wall was broad and high with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels...” (Revelation 21:10-12a). Such walls paint images of safety, re-establishing identity, and gleaming with the glory of heaven.

- Some walls, however, are not so good, but ugly walls erected out of hatred and fear.

We think about the Great Wall of China – dating back to the 7th century BC. It took some 2,000 years to complete with an estimated 400,000+ lives lost in the building this wall of defense against northern nomadic invasion. We think about the Berlin Wall – built to seal off West Berlin from East German territory. Then there is the Iron Curtain – stretching across all of Europe, dividing the entire continent into communist and capitalist ‘blocs’ to keep western influence out of the eastern bloc. Such walls point to the deeper, darker issue of humanity’s sin; for beneath every block, every stone ... is pride, hatred, fear ... and a desire to be our own god.

Background

In Ephesians, chapter two, the apostle Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus coming for Jews and Gentiles. Jesus is Emmanuel (God with us) and he has come to redeem every individual of every race, nation, tribe, language, and people-group upon the planet. In fact, he came to redeem and restore the whole of creation. “For this is how God loved the **world** (*cosmos*): He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, bold print and italics added). The Christ of God has come to save the universe in its entirety! (see Ephesians 1:19-23). Walls erected to promote deception, division, hatred, and mistrust are now broken in Christ. Listen to Paul’s words to the church in Ephesus—

“For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us” (Ephesians 2:14).

Read Ephesians 2:1-18

When we are united with Christ, he blesses us “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 1:3). Did you know Jesus Christ has the power to break down every wall that separates us from God and from one another. At times we may erect walls in our own homes, families, marriages, relationships. Think about it: after the Fall in Genesis, chapter three, sin separates Adam and Eve from God. And as a result, a life of toil causes them to blame one another and want to rule over (or control) one another. In Genesis, chapter four, Cain becomes angry at God and erects a wall of hatred toward his brother Abel that leads to murder.

Discussion:

There are times we may suffer from the erection of walls in our own homes. A husband sees his wife as being on the opposite team, or the wife sees her husband as the one who is holding her back. Instead of being in-step (united) as a couple, they become bitter over unresolved issues or feelings of competition or mistrust.

- If married, what can we do to truly see ourselves as one flesh with our spouse? How can we promote true unity within our marriage?
- Sometimes children and parents are at enmity. Most first responders say domestic violence is perhaps the most painful and devastating of calls. What can we do to work at unity within our families?
- How is a divided, unhealthy, hate-filled home the precursor to prejudice and racism in the community? (see Jesus’ words in Mark 3:24-25)

“Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins ... all of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much ...” (vv1, 3, 4 italics added).

Think about this—

The ‘but God’ moments in your life changes everything. As one commentator shared: “We were dead because of our sins (2:5), but God. We were rebels against him, but God. We were enslaved by the devil and our sinful natures, but God. These may be the two most welcome words in all of Scripture: “but God.” God could have left us spiritually dead, in rebellion against him and in bondage to our sins. But he didn’t.” (from study notes on Ephesians 2:4 *Life Application Study Bible* Tyndale p.2052)

Has the Lord been patient, kind, and forgiving toward you? Then allow his mercy to flow through you. Be a conduit of his grace toward others. Be generous towards the people around you, those who are different, among your own family members, or those with whom you may disagree. Pray, yes, for the Lord to surround you with his shield of love and send his holy angels to protect your home (Psalm 5:11-12). But Jesus does not call us to build an ugly wall of hatred, self-preservation and isolation. He shows us how to tear down such walls of injustice, prejudice and racism. There is only one race: the human race.

Since Jesus Christ has graciously invited outsiders, like you and me, to draw near to him, let us be about the work of reconciliation. Read aloud Paul's words to the church in Corinth—

“So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view ... This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:16a, 17-19).

Read Ephesians 2:19-22

When we profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept his gift of salvation, we become part of his living Church upon our baptism – this ‘holy dwelling’ where God lives by his Spirit. We become members of God's family! (v19) The apostle Paul spoke with great clarity when he said: “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

- Close by sharing together at least one take-away from this lesson/discussion.
- Pray. Ask the Lord to help us be a conduit of his love and grace; and to help us maintain an attitude of humility and gratitude as we live into the light of his truth.

One Year Bible Reading

Sept. 13: Isaiah 12:1-14:32, 2 Corinthians 13:1-14, Psalm 57:1-11, Prov 23:9-11
 Sept. 14: Isaiah 15:1-18:7, Galatians 1:1-24, Psalm 58:1-11, Proverbs 23:12
 Sept. 15: Isaiah 19:1-21:17, Galatians 2:1-16, Psalm 59:1-17, Proverbs 23:13-14
 Sept. 16: Isaiah 22:1-24:23, Galatians 2:17-3:9, Psalm 60:1-12, Proverbs 23:15-16
 Sept. 17: Isaiah 25:1-28:13, Galatians 3:10-22, Psalm 61:1-8, Proverbs 23:17-18
 Sept. 18: Isaiah 28:14-30:11, Galatians 3:23-4:31, Psalm 62:1-12, Prov. 23:19-21
 Sept. 19: Isaiah 30:12-33:9, Galatians 5:1-12, Psalm 63:1-11, Proverbs 23:22

HOT TOPICS

STUDYING THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

Text: Ephesians 2

PLAIN TRUTH

On the cross Jesus _____ the wall of _____ that separates us and by _____ of our sin the _____ of racism and prejudice can be _____.

1. Humanity has a _____ problem which manifests itself in prideful _____ over one _____.
2. God created _____ race, the _____ race, but we decided to build _____.
3. We, each _____ of the _____ race, were _____ to be God's _____.
4. Those who are _____ to God through Christ are given a ministry of _____ in a world of _____.
5. _____ is not found in walls, but in Christ as we are God's _____ place.

Recommended Reading:

Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility (George Yancy), *Generous Justice* (Timothy Keller), *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* (Eric Metaxas), *The Long Shadow of the Civil War: Southern Dissent and Its Legacies* (Victoria E. Bynum), *Life of Rev. A. Crooks* (E. W. Crooks), *Gandhi: Portrait of a Friend* (E. Stanley Jones)

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