

Ephesians 2:11-22

Background

- “Paul writes this letter from prison because he has been falsely charged with taking a non-Jew inside the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21:28). Taking a non-Jew beyond a particular dividing point in the temple was such an important breach of Jewish law that the Romans even permitted Jewish leaders to execute violators of this law. Paul’s readers in Ephesus and Asia undoubtedly know why Paul is in prison (Acts 21:27, 29); thus for them, as well as for Paul, there can be no greater symbol of the barrier between Jew and non-Jew than ‘the dividing wall’ of verse 14. But Paul says that this dividing wall is shattered in Christ.” [IVP Bible Background Commentary]
- Paul describes the pagan readers as being “without hope” prior to God (12). In the Greco-Roman world death was paired with hopelessness: “hopes are for the living; the dead are without hope” (Theocritus, *Idyll* 4.42); “The sun can set and rise again / But once our brief light sets / There is one unending night to be slept through” (Catullus 5.4-6) [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, p. 96, on 1 Thess 4:13].

Optional Question

To say Jews and Greeks (and male and female and rich and poor and slave and free etc.; cf. Gal 3:28, Eph 1:10) are made by Christ into a new “humanity” (15) is to say that what binds them together in Christ is stronger than the bonds of kinship, sex, class and status, background and history and culture. Which of the following best answers the Christian who says, “I don’t feel this! I am honestly closer to non-Christian Americans from my home town than I am to Christians from across the world, or even from one block over. Those Christians I *do* feel closest to already share my culture, race and class. Why does Ephesians not describe *my* experience?”

- a. It’s classic already/not-yet: The “Ephesian experience” only occurs rarely in this age as Christ is formed in us (Gal 4:19).
- b. This happens only as we do what the early church did, and deliberately act to integrate the church.
- c. You can experience this now if you invest in another believers long term and show the sort of vulnerability which is over and over commended by Scripture: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves” (Phil 2:3). If you don’t deliberately cultivate relationships where you share your failures and fears, the “dividing wall” (14) remains.
- d. This is an act of the Spirit which is primarily accomplished in true corporate worship (John 4:24).
- e. Abolishing the law made this possible (16)! We are bound to other believers as we acknowledge our complete dependence on the cross and the “filthy rags” of our own achievements and talents. Jews and Greeks had to stop thinking of themselves as special and superior. Jesus accomplished that.
- f. None of the above.

Do you experience the bonds described in 2:11-22? What can we do to foster stronger bonds of Christian love in our small group and church?

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Fun Fact: Referring to Paul’s “new humanity”, Clement of Alexandria, in the 2nd century, referred to Christians as “we who worship God in a new way, as *the third race*” (*Strom.* 6.5.41.6).