

## Ephesians 2:11-18

I am deviating away from John for a few weeks. We will come back to John 6. There is one more message that must be preached from this great chapter. We will get to that in a couple of weeks.

The recent events of our nation have brought absolute chaos to our nation. I am referring the violence of Charlottesville and the events that took place following that day.

Not only has it increased the divide in racial and political differences, it has also ramped up the hatred and violence. It has divided families, and can have the potential of dividing members of the church. I am speaking specifically of the Church universal. The divide is already there.

I sensed the need to address all these events this past Sunday. However, after praying and looking at scriptures, I felt the need to spend a Sunday morning on this. I want to give you the biblical answer as to why the divides are there, and also the biblical answer of what can be done to bring unity to our families, churches, and nation.

The answers to both questions are simple. These answers are found in Ephesians 2. Please turn to that passage. It is on the screen for you.

## Ephesians 2:11-19

*<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands—  
<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.  
<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.  
<sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,  
<sup>15</sup> by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.  
<sup>17</sup> AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;  
<sup>18</sup> for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.*

Let me point out two things that help us understand this passage. First, pay attention to verse 14. The dividing wall is what I want you to understand. Literally it is the dividing wall of barriers. The dividing wall is that which separates. What barriers serve as a dividing wall? In the passage, more than one thing that divides people.

First, there is the religious barrier that serves as part of the dividing wall.

The Law of Moses was that which separated the Jews from the rest of the nations. The Law was given to bring man to God. However, there was a permanent wall for certain people including the nations. If you lived in that day and went to the temple area in Jerusalem, you will be allowed to enter into the court of the Gentiles. It was also the area that Jewish women were allowed to enter. However, a wall was put up which no Gentile nor woman was allowed to pass. It was the wall that only a natural born Jewish male was allowed to cross. A Greek or Gentile who had converted to Judaism was still not allowed beyond that wall. It could be that if you were to compare a Gentile

with a Jew and find that the Gentile was more devout than the Jew, the Gentile was still not allowed to go pass that wall. The Law divided the races and the genders.

There was a second barrier that was a dividing wall. It was within the Law itself. Notice that verse 15 mentions the Law of commandments contained in ordinances. What is that about? I think that maybe referring to the interpretations of the Law and statutes given by God. Remember when Jesus saw the people in distress as sheep without a shepherd? The Jewish leaders were making these rules that made it hard for the average Jewish person of that day to follow the Law as God intended. Certain Jews were deemed unclean and thus kept from entering passed the Court of the Gentiles. The shepherds of Judea are one example of that. Because they were shepherds, they handled those filthy sheep. They can't be clean, thus they were declared unclean and not allowed passed the Court of Gentiles, and not allowed any further access to God.

There was a third natural barrier that served as a dividing wall. This barrier is the natural result of the previous two. When you have a group of people who are given more privileges in religion and who even are "better" than the average of their own countrymen, the natural, sinful man is bound to take root and create human prejudices. Pride sets in. The sense of superiority gets into the mindset, and thus the barrier is created that widens over time. Notice again, verse 11. "Remember that formerly you, the Gentiles by flesh (you were just born that way) but you were called "Uncircumcised" by the so-called "Circumcision." That's name calling. That's racism. The Jews saw themselves as the superior race over all other nations.

Now, let's put ourselves all in the same boat. There is a fourth barrier of dividing wall. We see it clearly in the last barrier. It is the barrier of dividing wall that exists between all mankind and God. That barrier wall is called sin.

Sin is the barrier wall that separates us from God. The Law teaches us that we are sinners. Sin is that which made us strangers to the covenant of promise, without God, and without hope. Sin is that which created the prejudice between Jew and the nations. It is sin that is the ultimate cause of all that breeds disunity. The Jews would tell the nations, "You are far off from God, and we are near." Bragging rights, right? Not so quickly, Jewish people. The early chapters of Romans declare you to be far off also. Of all the people who could be near, it is you. You has the Law. BUT, though you had the Law, you did not obey them. You told everyone else what to do, but you did not do them. You are sinners the same as the nations.

When we were in Bethlehem in Round O, one of our members had adopted a Chinese girl. She was complaining of the discrimination she was seeing. I said, "Janice, let me tell you something. As long as there is sinful, human nature, there will be discrimination." She didn't like that. She gave me a look that would have killed me. A few weeks later, Janice came back to me and said, "I got to thinking about what you said. You're right. As long as we are here on earth in our sinful, human nature, there will be discrimination."

There is the answer to the first question. What is causing all the division going on in our nation today? Sin is the ultimate cause. Meeting together and talking of differences may help. However, it will not cure the ultimate problem.

So, what then, is the answer to the divisions we are experiencing in our nation?

It's here in this passage. Do you see it? Verse 14. He Himself is our peace. Who is? Jesus is. How did He do that? Verse 16 tells us. It is through the cross. Christ makes it possible for there to be

unity. For, Christ took away the enmity between us and God. At the same time He took away the enmity that was between us and anyone not like us racially, nationally, and any other way. Remember the ultimate enmity is sin. Christ to take away our sin. Christ died so that we may be forgiven. Christ died so that we can be reconciled to God and eventually to fellow man.

There it is. The biblical answer to this division that is taking place in America is forgiveness and reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

Notice four statements from verse 14 to verse 16. The power of the cross is that it does create unity.

Verse 14 – *He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one.*

Jesus makes us one, but not in the sense of making us uniform, one form as if robots that all work the same. The Greek word reflects that idea. The idea of this word is that we are diverse, but unified. We are different, God honoring that difference, yet brought together in unity at the foot of the cross.

One, as used in this verse is best illustrated in a football team. The team works together as a unit, but each member of the team of different, distinct responsibilities. Some of the members are defensive backs. They don't do the job of the quarterback, but as a defensive back. The quarterback does his job, but it isn't the same as the offensive guard. Each has different responsibilities with one goal—making touchdowns so that the team can win the game.

This is what it looks like to be one in Christ.

Verse 15 – *He abolished in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of Commandments contained in ordinances, so that (for the purpose that) He might make create the two into one new man.* Now I use “create” because it is literally the word used. I don't have confirmation of this, but I wonder if the idea is that this creation is something only God can do.

Verse 16 – *And that He might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross.*

There's the church! There's the church! If there is a model of what unity looks like that the world can learn from, it is the church, together as One under the Lordship of Jesus at the foot of the cross. Families unite under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

People from different geographical locations, unite under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

People of different languages, sign language is a language just as English is a language. Let us unite under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

People of different races, let us unite under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, so that as the community and the nation look for what this nation needs, let them look to Maple Baptist Church and see what unity looks like that will last for eternity.

Verse 18 – *for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.*

In a contemporary African church, a missionary officiated at a communion service. As he looked around to see who had gathered, he could not help but to be moved deeply in his spirit. He saw the chief of the Ngoni tribe along with many other members of that tribe. He also saw members of the Senga and the Tumbuka tribes. All were singing, praying, and participating in the Lord's Supper together. In former years each of these tribes loved to brag about how many men, women, and children of the other tribes they had killed, raped, or maimed. The old chief can remember the days when the Ngoni would go out and attack leaving a trail of burned and devastated villages and had

come home with their pears bloodied with the death of the other peoples. They once were divided by the spilling of each other's blood, but now they are united because of the spilled blood of Jesus Christ, their Savior, their Lord who has brought them by that death into one union within the body of that local congregation.

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