

Feb 2/25 – Leaders’ Guide

Ephesians 2:11 -22 The Gospel Heals Divisions

1. In this text Paul will be speaking into a division between Jew and Gentile. What are some of the divisions that exist in our world? What is the contemporary wisdom for how to address those divisions?

This question obviously has the potential to bring some “hot button” topics to the surface. That’s ok – give space for it – creating a space for all kinds of conversation will deepen your connection as a group. You may want to frame the conversation a bit so that if the topics raised cause concern for others they aren’t responding or trying to “correct” what they see as problematic with other people’s thinking as that will diminish your connection as a group.

Many of the solutions to address such divisions involve such things as education, exposure (developing relationship with those who are different), finding commonalities etc...

These solutions though they do have positive impact however rarely get after the heart of what brings about division, that is pride – the belief that we are somehow superior to those who are different. As an example, when we see wrong in a person we don’t focus on our commonalities to realize that we are just as capable of that same wrong, we seem to focus on what makes us different. Oh your that way because your left-wing, or your that way because your right-wing.

I might encourage you to see if you can’t move the discussion toward the reality that all the raw materials for every division reside in the human heart and that Paul’s writing is meant to address the heart with gospel truths. Gospel truths that are brought to the surface with his linking words – you were – but God – so then...

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

You were...

2. (12) What was the Gentile relationship to God before Christ? What do each of these phrases mean?

The uncircumcision – a racial slur weaponized against Gentiles

Separated from Christ and Alienated from the Commonwealth of Israel – they were not part of those chosen to reveal the nature and character of God through their being given the law, but those who were chosen for that purpose were to do so in order to draw the gentiles to the heart of God – they saw it as making them superior to the gentiles – so begin to despise them

Strangers to the covenant of promise – related to the next conviction in that God had given promises to Israel about God’s plan to make all things new.

Without hope – the Jews believed in history’s progression toward God’s kingdom of peace and justice – the gentiles believed in the cyclical nature of history – a time of glory followed by destruction – for the gentile the time of glory was behind them so only destruction awaited.

Without God in the world – they had come to understand that their pantheon of gods were but a figment of their imagination, idols made from human hands

3. (11-12) Paul wants them to “remember” this reality. What impact would remembering who they were before Christ have on the relationship between Jew and Gentile?

It would appear by Paul’s focus on the gentile first that the church was becoming predominantly gentile and the gentiles were looking down on the Jews in their midst. To remind the Gentile who they were without Christ would address the heart of pride that was at the center of any bubbling division in their midst.

But now...

4. (13-18) How does Jesus’ work on the cross reconcile Jew and Gentile? How did he break down the barrier?

The picture of the temple helps us to understand what Paul is saying here. In the time of Paul the temple was separated out into different circles of access. The holy of holies was in the center. For the Jew this was the center of the cosmos, where heaven and earth met, where God’s presence, the Shekina glory dwelt. Only one person was able to enter, the high priest, on one day a year, the day of atonement. He would enter with bells on his robes, a rope on his waist, so if he didn’t offer the right sacrifices with the right heart and the holiness of God consumed him, signified by the bells stopping their jingling the other priests could bring him out by the rope around his waist. Outside of that was the court of the priests, outside of that the court of the Jewish men, further still the court of Jewish women. Down a flight of stairs surrounded by a 4 ½ foot wall was the court of the gentiles. Posted at regular intervals was a sign that read – no foreigner may enter through the barrier or enclosure around the temple, anyone who is caught doing so will have themselves to blame for their ensuing death.

One group – the Jews may have been near the holy of holies – they had the covenants, the promise, the law. One group may have been far – the Gentiles – who had none of those things. But neither group had access to the holy of holies – neither group had access to the presence of God.

Jesus’ work on the cross is that of our high priest, who offers the perfect sacrifice for sin, upon his death the temple curtain that separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple was torn in two giving access to the presence of God for both Jew and gentile by faith.

The dividing wall has been broken down by Jesus abolishing the commandment of ordinances. Jesus doesn’t abolish the moral law – that still stands – but he removes our guilt in light of it and the ceremonial laws, dietary laws, circumcision laws, sacrificial laws that governed the Jewish practice of faith

5. (18) What is the ultimate result of Jesus' work on the cross?

Both Jew and Gentile are brought into the presence of God where they have access to God as Abba, Father. They are reconciled to God and reconciled to one another.

6. Seeing that both Jew and Gentile were in equal need of the work of Jesus to make peace with God on the cross – what impact would holding onto that truth have on the relationship between Jew and Gentile?

Both placed on level ground at the foot of the cross so any sense of pride or superiority from one to another on any grounds is unfounded. Any division that arose between them would be healed at the foot of the cross.

So then...

7. Because we have been made into a new humanity by the work of Jesus we are to relate to one another in a new way. As fellow citizens, as members of the household, as being joined together into a holy temple (holy of holies) where God dwells. Explore each image together and talk about what each image teaches us about how we are to relate to one another?

I. Fellow Citizens

As fellow citizens of the kingdom of God we have more in common with one another than any previous alignment based on gender, race, class, socioeconomic standing for we serve King Jesus together, we share the same worldview, are animated by the same hope of his return to make all things new and are shaped by the same love.

II. Members of Household of God

In the original language of the new testament (Greek) this word meant blood relations. This means that we are invited into deeper relationship with one another than we have anywhere else. Close enough to bare one another's burdens, vulnerable enough to confess our sins to one another that we might encourage and hold one another accountable in gospel transformation. We are not individuals we are members of a family, utterly dependant upon one another for our life and growth in Christ.

III. Joined in a Holy Temple

There are two words the new testament uses for temple. One of those words referred to the whole temple, the other just to the holy of holies. This is the word Paul uses. He has the absolute audacity to say not only are Jew and Gentile drawn into the holy of holies and are given access to the living God as Father, but they also actually become in Jesus THE holy of holies. The church then is the place where heaven and earth meet, the place where God is encountered, the place where the world gets a taste of God's future.

8. What impact do these truths have on how we relate to those who are different from us?

This is simply a personal reflection question to apply the truths of the passage. It may be helpful to chart the course into this question by having a response ready that acknowledges where you might live out divisions that are incompatible with the gospel. We all do – but by your acknowledging it you invite others to go there as well. Looping it back to the first question and raising what was raised there may also help tie up the conversation begun there.