

Session 1

January 13, 2019

WHEN RACES COLLIDE

Ephesians 2:11-22

For the next several weeks, the focus of the lessons is *Engaging Culture in an Ever-Changing World*. When I hear the word “culture,” I immediately shift into missionary/missions professor mode. I always teach that one of the most important characteristics of culture is that it is *dynamic*; meaning that *culture always changes*. Sometimes those changes are brief and passing (we call them “fads”). Other changes are here to stay (we call these “cultural shifts”). In any case, the cultural climate we live in is always changing. This impacts our world; and as our world absorbs cultural changes, culture responds with even more changes. The result is an ongoing spiral of actions and reactions.

In the meantime, some things *never* change! God Himself and the truth He presents never change (e.g.: Num. 23:19; Heb. 13:8; Ps. 119:89 et al.). Therefore, believers are required to embrace and apply unchanging principles from God’s word to a constantly changing society. And that task can be difficult—and painful—as we strive to be “in the world...but not of the world” (John 17:14ff). When dealing with cross-cultural situations in the church, there are a few things to remember...

At some point, we were all on the outside (vv. 11-12). Believers—of all people—should be absolutely colorblind when it comes to race! The Lord’s example of the Woman at the Well (John 4) and His story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) support the foundational, biblical truth that Christians are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). Our concern should never be *skin color*, but rather *heart condition*. Paul reminded the believers in Ephesus that at some point, they were all “outsiders;” excluded from the benefits and opportunities given to God’s people simply because they were gentiles. This was not only a *racial* exclusion (in Exodus, foreigners who embraced the Lord and were circumcised were entitled to all the benefits of Judaism, including the invitation to participate in the Passover celebration. See Lev. 19:34; Ex. 12:43 ff). This was also a *religious* exclusion (hence the requirement to be circumcised). Yet while God-fearing gentiles were allowed to worship the one true God, they were still prohibited from certain parts of the temple simply because they were not ethnic Jews; people of the promise by birth. In the same way, all people—even those who fear God—are (by birth into the sinful human race), separated from God. Maybe you remember a time when you were lost but seeking God. Perhaps you saw the fellowship among believers, realized they had something you did not, and you longed for it. At that time, you may have felt like the gentiles in Jerusalem who had a desire to worship the one true God, but encountered barriers along the way that kept them on the outside looking in.

Christ has removed the barriers, allowing access to God for all people (vv. 13-22). In these verses, Paul uses the example of the various temple barriers to illustrate what Christ has done to those “on the outside.” Christ’s sacrificial death not only tore the veil between the holy place and the holy of holies (Matt. 27:51), which eliminated the need for an earthly priest, but also broke down the “barrier of hostility” (v. 14), that wall that separated the temple’s Court of the Gentiles from the temple proper. This means that all people—regardless of ethnicity, race, language, or

background—were guaranteed equal access to God (v. 19). But the application does not end there! Paul finishes the discourse with a plea to the local church: since the blood of Christ removed the barrier that separated all of us from God (v. 13); and the same sacrifice knocked down the barriers that separate us as people (v. 14), and the same gospel of peace calls us all to reconciliation (vv. 16-17), and the same Spirit provides access to God (v. 18), and the church is built on one foundation (v. 20)...then the local church should be a unified, holy sanctuary, filled with God's Holy Spirit (v. 22). There is simply no room there for division!

- **Ephesians 2:11-12.** Without Christ, our differences can divide us.
- **Ephesians 2:13-18.** Christ treats us equally and gives us all access to the Father.
- **Ephesians 2:19-22.** All believers are one in Christ—and we should act like it.
- Refer to Galatians 3:28.