

Notes: *God's New People* (Ephesians 2:13-16)

Intro: The study of ancient history shows that none of today's social distinctions or racial barriers, are more exclusive than the separation between the Jews and Gentiles in Biblical times. The reason is because this barrier was not simply ethnic or cultural but theological. God had built it when he brought the Jew near in grace and left the Gentile far away in justice. But now, in Christ, both may draw near to God as "one new man in place of the two." This has tremendous relevance for our ministry! Christ has overthrown the world's hostilities. He has created a new people for himself.

#1: We must remember our reconciliation to God (16). The reconciliation of Jew and Greek in one new man signals that God in Christ is reconciling the world to himself. The new race created in Christ transcends all the old conflicts. It overwhelms all our former allegiances and hostilities. Christ hasn't merely patched up the old humanity, he has created a new one in Christ. All that is implied by the reconciliation of believing Jew and Gentile. But why? The Bible begins with the unity of mankind. But then Father Adam disobeyed God in the garden and through his disobedience both he and his descendents "fell" into a condition of sin and misery (Rom 5:12, 19). One sad effect of the fall is human division, enmity, and hostility. In Abraham, God chose Israel out of all the nations to his "unique" people and said he intended to use them to be a light to the nations. But Israel forgot her calling. She twisted her privilege into favoritism. She imagined herself as being chosen because she was great when she was actually small and righteous when she was actually stiff-necked. Thus Israel despised the nations. And the Gentiles too were also filled with their own pride and disdain. This enmity was fixed and irreconcilable. But Christ appeared to reconcile both through his cross. Their reconciliation reveals two things which have implications for the church's unity in our time. Both Jew and Gentile were separated from God because of his justice. In his justice, God left the Gentiles in their sin. He passed them by. He left them at a distance and alienated from him. But Israel too was separated from God by their sins. True God brought them near by giving them the prophets, priesthood, and kings. But the sacrifices at the altar testified that sinful Israel could approach God only by the sacrifice he provided. And the great curtain in the Temple cut off Israel from God's immediate presence in the Holy of Holies. The curtain was impenetrable. It was as though God was saying to Israel: "I love you but I can't stand to look on your sinful face." Both Jew and Gentile were reconciled to God because of his mercy. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. God has shut up the mouths of all before the bar of his justice that he might show mercy to all through Jesus. He is the true offspring of Abraham and the light to the nations. The promise is held out to us not only of reconciliation to God but to one another.

#2: We must remember our peace with God (14). At the back of Paul's mind may have been the literal wall that separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts of the Jerusalem Temple. For a Gentile to beyond this carried an automatic death sentence (Acts 21:27). In the death of Christ Jesus, that dividing wall has been broken down. Now in Christ Jesus, all share in the court of God. Not only has the dividing wall been broken down, but the curtain barring access to the holiest place has been torn in two. Jesus our Great High Priest has taken away our sins by his death but more than that by his resurrection and ascension into heaven he has opened the way for us to approach the throne of God as his beloved children. God receives all who come to him by faith in Christ's blood. All are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. All are accepted by him. All are beloved sons and daughters. All have equal access to him and standing before him (Gal. 3:28). Having peace with God we must live in peace with one another

“forgiving one another as God has forgiven us.”

#3: We must remember our identity in Christ (15). Our physical features, personalities, possessions, accomplishments, failures, are tokens of our identity. Our identity determines how we relate to the world and others. But reconciled to God through the blood of Christ gives us a deeper identity still: we are the people of God, the body of Christ, the fellowship of the Spirit. Why? The barrier of *human culture* has been abolished. Israel was the church underage awaiting its full inheritance as God’s son when Messiah came. The Mosaic ordinances, as a guardian, fostered the hope of Israel in her Messiah. The Mosaic ordinances were shadows pointing to Christ (Gal 3:23ff.; Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). The death of Christ brought the death of the Mosaic Law but also the barrier of culture. We need not become Jews. We may worship in spirit and truth regardless of our culture! All believers, regardless of culture, worshiping in Jesus’ name have God in their midst (Mat 18:20)! The barrier of *divine condemnation* has been abolished. The moral law is our standard of conduct but not the way of salvation. Jesus obeyed the law for us and in his death bore its consequences for us (Col 2:14). God has done this for us who were far off. How many more he may gather to himself.