

The biblical key to overcoming racial discrimination.

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Ephesians / Prejudice; Bigotry / Ephesians 2:11–22

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Introduction

Recently you may have seen how the organisation called black lives matter became prominent with the death of George Floyd.

It was a movement promoting civil disobedience in protest against police brutality against African American people.

In reaction movements like blue lives matter which wanted those who killed law enforcement officers to be sentenced under hate crimes.

All lives matter was another movement started in response to these movements.

In SA we have political movements like the Economic freedom fighters (EFF), who claim that the black people have been sold out to capitalism and have been robbed of their land and the “Afrikaner weer stand beweging(AWB)” focusing on creating an independent Afrikaans “boere staat”.

In India you have the cast system classifying the high cast from the low caste people.

In Tanzania your tribalism, to such a degree that some churches are affiliated according to certain tribes.

All these systems and movements create dis unity and divisions based on various reasons.

Racism, racial discrimination, tribalism, ethnocentrism, caste systems etc are some of the labels society uses to describe these dividing factors.

The world's tries to solve these divisions through

- education,
- changing the government
- changing the definition of words
- destroying monuments
- rioting,
- violence, civil unrest
- taking away property or wealth and trying to redistributing it.
- Shaming people, and many other ways.

But this problem shows itself worldwide.

The bible states

2 Peter 1:3 ESV

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

God's word has the answer for divisions, disunity, racial discrimination, social and spiritual divisions.

The problem originated with the fall of mankind in Gen 3, where man became an enemy of God and hatred for other people started.

In Gen 4 Cain murdered his own brother due jealousy and hatred.

At the tower of Babel, the people rebelled against God and so He confused the languages dividing people into different tribes and nations.

These divisions were the result of sin.

Only in Christ are these divisions restored.

Our passage this morning sheds some light on the biblical answer for racial hatred.

Proposition

5 truths about Jesus conquers racial hatred

1. Jesus was far from you 11-12
2. Jesus brought you close 13
3. Jesus is your peace 14-16
4. Jesus gave you access 17-18
5. Jesus gave you a family 19-22

Reading

Ephesians 2:11–22 *ESV*

¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—

¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,

¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple

in the Lord.

²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

In 2:1-10 Paul had shared how God in Christ made the elect spiritually alive, raising them up and changing the believer status as a display of His glorious grace.

In 2:11-22 In Christ, believer is united with other believers into a corporate unity, called the church.

Man was created to reflect Gods character, and part of that is unity in the Godhead.

Jesus prayed for his disciples that they should be one. John 17:11,21,22

Epp 2: 11-12 Paul starts by explaining the disunity between the Jews and Gentiles and then set out to explain How in Christ they have become united in one new body.

1. Jesus was far from you 11-12

Ephesians 2:11–12 ESV

¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—

¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

11 Therefore remember

Therefore= implies a conclusion.

Paul commands the believer to remember what?

That they were socially and spiritually alienated from the people of God and from God.

Paul begins by naming them.

that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—

Gentiles= GK term ethnos meaning nations

The Paul's day, in the church the biggest division was between the Jews and the Gentiles (other nations).

Israel was God's chosen nation (Amos 3:2), set apart from the other nations to be a blessing to them.

God wanted the world to notice how Israel lived and acted differently to them, so as to be a witnessing tool to draw them to Himself.

Exodus 19:5–6 ESV

⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;

⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Sadly, Israel did not fulfil her calling and preferred to condemn the nations and to show hatred and racial prejudice towards them rather than to be witnessing to them.

“A rabbinic writer tells of an incident that explains the common Jewish attitude toward Gentiles. A certain Gentile woman came to Rabbi Eleazar, confessed that she was sinful, and told him that she wanted to become righteous. She wanted

to be accepted into the Jewish faith because she had heard that the Jews were near to God. The rabbi is said to have responded, “No. You cannot come near,” and then shut the door in her face.” (MacArthur)

The Gentiles were socially alienated from Israel.

The Jews they were called them, the uncircumcised, those with foreskins or even dogs.

Not having the physical mark of circumcision, excluded the Gentiles from the Jews.

They were viewed as inferior.

Paul’s point in mentioning that the circumcision was done in the flesh actually highlights that this is not what marks your relationship to God. (MacArthur)

Romans 2:28–29 ESV

²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.

²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

The principle seen here is that racism, or racial discrimination focuses on the physical outward appearance of a person rather than the heart.

Paul explains 5 other important distinctions that excluded the Gentiles from the Jews.

vs 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ,

They(nations) were spiritually alienated because they were Christ less, separated

from Christ (meaning Messiah)

There was no messianic hope among the Gentile nations.

They hoped in their idols.

alienated from the commonwealth of Israel

They(nations) were spiritually alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, excluded from being a citizen of the nation.

Israel was God's chosen people in a theocracy originally.

God was their king, He blessed protected and loved.

But the Gentiles/nations had rejected God and His reign and were therefor not part of that blessed community.

and strangers to the covenants of promise,

They(nations) were strangers (unknown) to the covenants of promises God made with Israel.

The covenants of promise refer to the unconditional promises God made with Israel.

- The Abraham covenant which promised land, nation and blessing, Gen 12
- the Priestly covenant which promised them an eternal priesthood, Num 25
- the Davidic covenant which promised the eternal kingdom 2 Sam 7
- the New covenant which promised transformed hearts. Jer 31

God promised Israel, land, a kingdom, a priest, a king, and to those who believed in the Messiah's substitutionary sacrifice, he promised eternal life and heaven.

having no hope

The Gentiles excluded without hope.

They had no hope of the Messiah, the Davidic kingdom or Gods blessings.

True biblical hope is based upon the firm future expectation of good based on the promises of God.

Hope comes from the gospel and produces love and faith.

Colossians 1:4–5 ESV

⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,

⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

Without the gospel, the Gentiles had no promises of God and therefore no hope.

and without God in the world.

They were without God (Atheist) = the Greek term.

They were excluded and godless.

They had many idols, but they did not have the true God of the Bible.

Galatians 4:8 ESV

⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.

God had called Israel to be like missionaries/mediators (Kingdom of priests) to the

Gentiles, to call them to come to God.

Sadly, they failed to do so.

Application

1. Are you without Jesus?
2. Do you have no hope?
3. Are you socially stigmatised and labelled?
4. Do you feel discriminated against because of your race or skin colour?
5. There is hope in Jesus.

2. Jesus brought you close 13

Ephesians 2:13 ESV

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

“But now” highlights a contrast.

Those who were far off was the common way Jews described the Gentiles (Other nations)

Isaiah 57:19 ESV

¹⁹ creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,” says the LORD, “and I will heal him.

But in Christ Jesus, every person, whether Gentile or Jew is brought near to God by His blood.

This is not nearness in geographical, cultural or ceremonial terms.

But nearness in regard to spiritual intimacy.

The grammar indicates that this action was done to them.

God in his grace through Christ saved them and gave them a new corporate identity (Chris Woolley)

At the heart of all divisions: racism, racial hatred, bitterness, disunity is sin.

The trinity has perfect unity, because there is no sin there.

The true solution to racial hatred, disunity has to deal with the problem of sin.

Jesus's death on the cross, paid the penalty, broke the power of sin and paved the way for the future deliverance from sin.

Because Jesus through his death and resurrection overcame the barrier of sin, the gospel paves the way towards peace.

To have peace with man, you first need peace with God.

Application

Every one of us comes with a cultural identity and cultural baggage which divides us from one another and makes us spiritually far from God.

Maybe it's the language, or the way you eat, or live or social and economic divides.

But Jesus came to give you a new corporate culture, a new identity and a new way of relating.

If you have trusted in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, then you are a Christian.

This means your first a Christian and then a Zulu, English man, Afrikaner etc.

You cannot retain all the elements of your culture.

God's word governs any culture.

Where your culture is sinful, God calls you to abandon that and embrace the Christian worldview and Christian culture.

BY removing the sin barrier, Jesus brings peace not only with God but also with one another.

3. Jesus is your peace 14-16

Ephesians 2:14–16 ESV

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,

¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

14 For he himself is our peace,

Paul emphasised that Jesus alone is our peace.

Jesus is the tool God uses to bring peace.

Being sinless, He is the only one truly able to bring peace.

Isaiah 9:6 ESV

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

No man-made laws, no ceremonies, no good deeds can bring peace between men

and peace with God.

Sin lies at the heart of all these conflicts.

James reveals the source of quarrels.

James 4:1–3 ESV

¹ What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Peace comes, when you deny your selfish desires, and replace it with sacrificial love.

This only happens when you come to salvation.

Galatians 2:20 ESV

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances,

In Jesus, there is no long the distinction between Jew and Gentiles, they are now united, they are one.

Before there was disunity, but now in Jesus there was unity

He broke down (destroyed, reduced to ruin) the dividing wall.

The dividing wall originally referred to the separating wall which separated the Gentiles from the Jews in the Temple court.

This barrier had a sign which stated

“No Gentile may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.” (Macarthur)

God had originally separated the Jews from the Gentiles with the intention of saving both, not only the Jews.

The Gentiles court was created originally for the purpose of witnessing to the Gentile nations, a space for evangelism.

However, this very court in Jesus’ day was used as a den of robbers rather than a place of witness. Mrk 11:17

The dividing wall illustrated the hostility between the Jews and Gentiles and grammatically is defined as that hostility (that sense of deep-seated ill will, hatred, viewing others as enemies).

The grammar indicates the dividing wall is explained or defined as this emotional hatred, hostility towards others.

Jesus destroyed that barrier of hatred by dying on the cross paving the way towards unity.

Not only that Jesus dealt with the very external source of their hatred.

Jesus **abolishing** (made it powerless, invalidated, rendered ineffective) the law of commandments expressed in ordinances

The **law of commandments expressed in ordinances (formal rules and regulations)**, refers to the ceremonial laws, the feast, laws on cleanliness, sacrifices and offerings, those outward practices that distinguished and divided Israel from the nations and was source for these culturally divided groups to hate one another creating a situation of hostility.

The laws were intended to reveal sin, to be a tutor pointing towards Jesus and not to keep people away from Jesus.

Jesus not only kept the law perfectly, but fulfilled what it pointed to.

And now in Jesus, the division of hostility had been destroyed and the very reason for this hostility (the laws) had been nullified.

Before Jesus, there Jews could not:

- eat with Gentiles
- worship with Gentiles in the Temple
- do the ceremonial acts together.

But now in Christ,

- Jews and Gentiles believers eat together
- worship together
- They are united in the body of Christ.

Not only did Jesus deal with the source of the problem, He nullified the law in order that He might create the both into a new creation.

that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

In Christ Jesus created a new (a different kind and quality) person unlike anything in the past.

The believer's nature is a changed nature, they are spiritually alive to God.

Since they are born again, their desires are changed, they now have desires to love and obey God and fellow man

They are no longer ruled by Sin, Satan and the world, but by Jesus.

The result is it making peace, the state of wellbeing, tranquillity with others and with God.

Jesus not only changed their nature, created a new human being, but also reconciled, both groups into one body (the church).

Reconciliation means to change the nature of a relationship.

From being a hater of God, to loving Him.

From being a hater of people to sacrificial love for them.

From being isolated in sin, to being united into his loving body, His church.

A body that loves, cares and encourage you to grow into greater Christ likeness.

Jesus did this through the cross.

vs 13 refers to the blood of Jesus that brought you near to God

vs 14 refers to the flesh of Jesus which made Jesus our peace

vs 16 refers to the cross of Jesus that accomplished reconciliation.

Killing the hostility= Gk term which means to cease, to eliminate.

While Jesus was killed on the cross, He killed, eliminated the hostility between Jews and Gentiles through the gospel.

Application

If you want to conquer racial hatred, preach the gospel.

As people respond to the gospel, their hearts are transformed, their reconciled with God and fellow man and what follows is peace and tranquillity.

Jesus eliminated the killed the hostility when He was killed on the cross.

If you want hostility to cease, begin with the gospel.

4. Jesus gave you access 17-18

Ephesians 2:17–18 ESV

¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Note that the Jews may be near, but for them to get access, they also need the gospel that brings peace.

Jesus is not only our peace but he also proclaimed peace not only to those who were far (the Gentiles) but also to those who were near, the Jews.

In His earthly ministry Christ primarily preached to the Jews but after his ascension Christ preached through his apostles and disciples the gospel that resulted in peace and in access.

“We” includes both Jews and gentiles who trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour gain access to the triune God “

Through Jesus every believer has access in the Spirit to God the Father.

The HS empowers the union between the Gentiles and the Jews.

1 Corinthians 12:13 ESV

¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

So, we see that the whole trinity is involved in the believer’s access to God.

In ancient times the shepherds would guard the entrance to the sheep’s pen at night. They were protected and cared for by the Shepherd.

Application

In the same way the only way you have access to God and His spiritual blessings is through Jesus Christ the great shepherd of our souls.

Hebrews 4:16 ESV

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Romans 5:2 ESV

² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

You can rejoice, because through the gospel, you can pray, and know you have access to the ear of God.

You have access to an intimate loving relationship with the trinity

You have access to His grace, His power, His blessings.

5. Jesus gave you a family 19-22

Ephesians 2:19–22 *ESV*

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Every believer in Christ is by definition a citizen of Gods kingdom.

Philippians 3:20–21 *ESV*

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,

²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Every believer belongs is a family member of Gods household.

In Christ you are a citizen of Gods kingdom, a member of His family, no matter what skin colour, what culture, what social status you have.

20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,

The reason you can have confidence that you have citizenship and a family is because it is based upon the firm foundation of the apostles and prophets

The grammar indicates not that they were the foundation, but that they were laying down the foundation.

The apostles and prophets brought Gods word and wrote Gods word.

So, you can have confidence that you are in His kingdom and part of his family based upon Gods word the Scriptures.

Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

The cornerstone in ancient building practices had to be strong and the rest of the building was orientated from the cornerstone.

Jesus is the strength, the support, the orientation and the unifying element of the entire body of Christ.

So, Jesus was the cause for you to be in His kingdom and part of His family based upon the Scriptures.

Acts 4:10–12 ESV

¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.

¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Jesus causes the growth in the church.

Jesus fits each believer to play his or her specific role in His body, the church.

22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Through Jesus the believers are built into a permanent dwelling for God in the Spirit.

The church comprises of every true believer, and every true believer is indwelt by God through the HS.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 ESV

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.

Application

So, we see Gods solution to racism and racial hatred.

1. Jesus died and rose again for your sin.
2. Jesus is our peace

3. Jesus broke down the hostility
4. Jesus annulled the law that divided
5. Jesus changed your nature
6. Jesus changed the relationship
7. Jesus provide access to the triune God
8. Jesus gave you citizenship in His kingdom and membership to His family

You can know this with confidence based upon His word and Christ being the cornerstone

Jesus is the one causing the growth, preparing you to be the permanent dwelling place of God in the Hs.

Conclusion

5 truths about Jesus conquers racial hatred

1. Jesus was far from you 11-12 as Gentile unbelievers
2. Jesus brought you close 13, gave you a new corporate identity through his death on the cross
3. Jesus is your peace 14-16, as he destroyed the hostility, changed your nature and how you relate
4. Jesus gave you access 17-18 to the triune God
5. Jesus gave you a family 19-22 and citizenship based upon His word and Jesus continues to grow you and build you into the dwelling place of God in your hearts.

