

One new man: An end of racism

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Based on the Bible: Ephesians 2

Shalom and thank you Peter for your kind introduction and for the opportunity to address the gathering tonight. For those who don't know, this is my home congregation, and although I'm often away speaking and teaching throughout the country and throughout the world, I sense a real support from so many here, and as a missionary to the Jewish people, let me say thanks for that support. It is so needed. And I don't take this lightly.

Tonight Peter has asked me to speak to the subject of *the end of racism*. This is a tough one, as I see racism in so many places, even here in Australia. Usually it is mixed with a bit of humour and lightness. Calling someone a wog or a Leb or using other defining terms may be socially acceptable in some situations, but not in my house. Not around my kids. Anyone who has had to wear such a badge will be sensitive to the issues surrounding it. At Joondalup Golf Course where I visited last week, the function rooms carry titles of flowers and trees that are on the grounds. So one room is the *Jacaranda* Room and one is the *Black Boy* room. The director told me that next year they are changing that title to the *Grass Tree* room. As a Jew, who has been called kike, hymie, and Christ-killer, I appreciate that change of title for the room at the resort.

So what is racism after all? When the state of Arizona in the US enacted an immigration law earlier this year enabling the police to search suspected criminals, the buzz around the country was that the law invited racism. This from Alison Peek, a reporter from neighbouring Utah, "When Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed the toughest immigration law in the United States, she opened the door to profiling, discrimination and racism. It was one of the biggest steps backward this country has seen in more than 225 years. Members of Utah's state legislature are considering similar legislation.

"The law requires people to carry documentation that proves their legal status at all times and gives the police the ability to detain anyone they suspect of being in the country illegally.

"President Obama spoke out against the bill before it was signed, saying it threatens "to undermine basic notions of fairness that we cherish as Americans ..." He agrees that illegal immigration is a huge problem that must be dealt with, but believes giving the police this kind of power will undermine their relationship in the communities they serve." (<http://www.examiner.com/political-buzz-in-salt-lake-city/arizona-law-invites-legalized-racism>)

The law doesn't do that at all, if I read things right, but the reporting was vast and swift and unmeasured. Governor Brewer has survived the media and Obama's criticism and Arizona continues to survive in many ways.

So when they say 'racist' they mean noting someone as being from a certain ethnicity. Fascinating. You do notice that I'm an American, right? Is that racist? You do notice I'm a male, right? So is that gender profiling? Not at all. It's observation of facts.

Racism comes to play when we deride another for being a member of that group. Princeton University says racism is "the prejudice that members of one race are intrinsically superior to members of other races or discriminatory or abusive behaviour towards members of another race." It's the actions associated with 'guilt by association' or antagonism against someone because they are a member of a group. Wow. Some Sea Eagles fans may qualify in this wide-sweeping antagonism if they pay out the Eels fans or the Panthers fans, you see? "What, you are from Melbourne? You must be ..." or when a Westie pays you out for being a person from "the leafy North Shore" they are demonstrating a geo-racism. You see? It's all subtle and complicated, but at the end of the day, racism may be defined as *hostility to a person because he is a representative of something you don't like*.

Now this is not a new phenomenon. The Bible records the tone of racism in Paul's writings to a fellow apostle Titus, "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." (Titus 1.12)

Wow that's pretty full on, isn't it? And hostile. And from where is this coming? From Jewish prophets against Gentiles. Listen to the whole section in context. "For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed." (Titus 1.10-16)

Although we Jews have copped some serious anti-Semitic verbiage, we can dish it out as well. We labeled Gentiles as dogs and each morning Jewish men still pray, "Blessed art thou, Lord our God, who has not made me a Gentile."

In the book of Ezra chapter 10, we see Israel repenting of marrying Gentile women and divorcing them en masse. Solomon is considered the wisest of the Jewish people throughout history, but listen to this charge: "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away." (1 Kings 11.1-3)

So we are warned again and again to stay within the ranks, and the view of Gentiles diminished from any positive level it ever had, to be at times *despicable* among most Jewish people in Roman times.

So maybe that helps you see our text tonight, from Ephesians chapter 2. Why was it so outlandish, so foreign to the people of Israel that the mystery of the church, Gentiles and Jews in the same worship centre, in the same family, in the same Temple?

In the first 10 verses in chapter 2 of Ephesians, Paul the apostle clearly lays out how people are saved. It is not by works of righteousness, or as we say in Hebrew *teshuva* (which is of major concern the last two weeks to Jewish people), not by the religious efforts of future followers, but by the grace of God and the faith of those who confess Jesus as Lord. That is found in verse 8 and 9 particularly clearly.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (2.8-9)

Now we turn our attention to the next section of the letter. Paul says that the Gentiles, and that's most of you guys, are without, or outside. Certainly if you are aware of the structure of most synagogues and the defining Temple in Jerusalem of Jewish worship, you would know that Gentiles were excluded.

Find these words in our text. 'without Christ', 'without citizenship', 'without covenants', 'without hope' and 'without God.' The Jews on the other hand brought you Messiah, are a citizenship of heavenly called people, were the recipients of the covenants, and hoped for eternity with God. Gentiles, you have no leg to stand on. No Jew would ever pass it on to you. It was territorially ours.

Although, and here's where I often disagree with my Jewish brethren, originally God was well known to the nations. Then after the Garden of Eden, about which we heard a couple weeks ago in our sermon series from Tim, the Jewish people alone stood as beacons of the light on the One True God. Before then, Gentiles had an opportunity to know God, but they knocked it back. They chose multi-gods and chose what they could see over what they could not see.

That increases the tragedy of Gentiles being without all these things.

The "but now" in verse 13 parallels the "but God" in verse 4. In each case God butts in, interrupting the plight of wayward humanity and bringing them and us to Himself. Awesome.

And here we see what God did for you Gentiles. He reconciled you, not only to Himself (16-18), but also reconciled you to the Jewish people (verses 13-15). Wow, a double whammy. A double fix. A massive blow to Jewish racism against Gentiles. There goes the neighbourhood!

This was the scene in the book of Acts. Can we look at chapter 10 of the book of Acts, please? There you see the apostle Peter having a tough time with a vision he has from the Almighty. Peter has been preaching for 10 years and is the main man of the church in Israel. He is staying with a man named Simon the Tanner in Joppa, outside modern Tel Aviv. And there he goes to the rooftop about noon, he gets hungry and falls into a trance. In the vision he sees all kinds of things being brought down to earth, things you would find on the TV show *Survivor*, but never in a kosher kitchen. God tells him to 'rise Peter, kill and eat.' Peter refuses on the basis of his Jewishness. The voice tells him, "What I have cleansed, no longer consider unclean." This vision happens three times, so you have to imagine that Peter 'gets' it, right? Surely the apostle to the Jews, the one who hung with Jesus most of his earthly career, that Peter who has healed sick people and raised dead people, he would 'get it,' right?

Wrong. He didn't get it. The Bible says, 'Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be.' (10.17). Wow, Peter didn't get it. But eventually over the next few hours he did, and he took a few Jewish believers in Jesus with him. They went to Cornelius, a Gentile, who had dispatched some soldiers to collect Peter and bring him up north about 50 miles to Caesarea.

Peter approached the house, and upon being given the platform to speak said, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I

was sent for.” (10.28-29) The vision was not about bacon double cheeseburgers, but about people who eat them... Gentiles!

The vision was not to give Peter permission to eat lobster and ham sandwiches, but was about going to the Gentiles with the Good News of Messiah and to include them. They who were ‘without’ are now able to be ‘brought near.’ Aha, there goes the neighbourhood!

The legal and structural barriers that prevented Gentiles from being part of the commonwealth of Israel are now gone. Now, seriously, whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. “(Joel 2, Romans 10.13). In fact there was a wall, a barricade found in the ruins of the 2nd Temple with this inscription, “no foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the holy place and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.’ That’s the wall which is broken down, decades before it actually fell under the Roman Titus in 70 AD.

That wall breaking, however, doesn’t mean we are ever the same. There are still Jews and there still are Gentiles. There are still women and there are still gentlemen’s toilets. There are slaves and there are free. Those ‘there is neither... nor’ statements (Galatians 3.28, Colossians 3.11) does not mean we are all the same. We still have ladies’ meetings and Onesimus and Philemon had different functions in the understanding of Paul in his letter. What the ‘neither Jew nor Greek’ phrases mean is that now Gentiles have access to the same God Jews had access to, and no race, no ethnic group, no one is superior to anyone else. That’s the end of racism. You are not better by human birth. You are not better due to color or *colorlessness* of your skin. God has given us all new life and anyone who names the name of Jesus (Y’shua) is a member of that family.

The result of that reconciliation is peace. Verse 14 says Jesus is our peace. Verse 15 says he ‘made peace.’ And verse 17 says he ‘preached’ peace. Getting things right with God means we will get things right with one another.

Last Friday and yesterday Jewish people worldwide observed a fast day. We celebrated the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, in Hebrew. That day is a day of reconciliation, of admitting our faults and crying out to God to forgive us. Most Jewish people who attended services last night left synagogues wondering if their prayers worked. They were not sure. They were wishful in their thinking.

But Jewish believers in Jesus and you here who confess the faith of Jesus in creed and song, you know in a great assurance that Jesus has forgiven you and you celebrate the advent of peace with Him. No wonder we feel compelled to pass that along to others. We preach peace because we have received peace.

Now we who were two are one. Paul uses that term again and again in chapter 2. God ‘made us both into one’ (verse 14), we are ‘one new man’ (.15), ‘one body’ (.16), and ‘one Spirit’ (.18)

The distance that separated us is diminished to naught. We are one nation (.19), one family (.19) and one Temple (.20-22). All that Israel was in the past, the new man, the one new man, is together in Jesus. It’s not a replacement of Israel; it’s an engrafting of Gentiles who believe into the new commonwealth of a new Israel which welcomes Gentiles.

Now neither spiritual death (verse 1) nor spiritual distance can keep people away from God. The Lord has made a way for us all.

Thanks be to God.

[On Jewish views of Gentiles:](#)

Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud

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Abstract: For more than a century, scholars of ancient Judaism and early Christianity have assumed that ancient Jews viewed Gentiles as ritually impure, and that this alleged principle of Gentile ritual impurity was the basis for a strict and burdensome policy of separation between Jews and non-Jews. The present volume corrects decades of erroneous scholarship on the question of Gentile ritual impurity and the history of Jewish perceptions of Gentiles in antiquity. Although purity and impurity were intimately connected with questions of identity and otherness in ancient Jewish culture, the terms “pure” and “impure” were employed in various ways by different groups of Jews to describe and inscribe sociocultural boundaries between Jews and Gentiles. Close analysis of biblical, Second Temple, New Testament, patristic, and rabbinic sources,

shows that at least four distinct modes of impurity were associated with Gentiles by different groups – ritual impurity, moral impurity, genealogical impurity, and carnal impurity. This unexpected diversity of ancient Jewish views of Gentile impurity is tied to widely differing definitions of Jewish group identity and the access of Gentiles to that identity. Consequently, ancient Jews exhibited widely varying attitudes towards intermarriage and conversion – the two processes by which group boundaries might be penetrated. These diverse views of the permeability of the Jewish–Gentile boundary through intermarriage or conversion, deriving in turn from diverse conceptions of Gentile impurity and Jewish identity, contributed to the rise of sectarianism in Second Temple Judaism, and to the separation of the early church from what would later become rabbinic Judaism.

Text of Ephesians Chapter 2

Eph. 2.1 ¶ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,

Eph. 2.2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Eph. 2.3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Eph. 2.4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

Eph. 2.5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Eph. 2.6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,

Eph. 2.7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Eph. 2.8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Eph. 2.9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Eph. 2.10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Eph. 2.11 ¶ 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 —

Eph. 2.12 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.

Eph. 2.13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Eph. 2.14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

Eph. 2.15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

Eph. 2.16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Eph. 2.17 And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near;

Eph. 2.18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Eph. 2.19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,

Eph. 2.20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

Eph. 2.21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;

Eph. 2.22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.