

Introduction:

Good morning!

ME:

- Baking soda + vinegar
- Two things we know will not go well together if we mix them. The outcome is explosive and volatile.

WE:

- Today, we divide churches over worship styles, carpet color, and coffee brands. In Paul's day, they were divided over circumcision and bacon.
- The world divides by: by race, politics, denominations, styles of worship, personalities, cultures.
- What does unity look like in the middle of that?
- Unity isn't just hard. It's holy. And God went to extreme lengths to make it possible.
- Paul's crescendo is about **unity**—one new humanity, not two peoples under one roof. How is that even possible with such diverse attitudes?

The early Church was asking the same thing. How can Jews and Gentiles Artemis worshipers and Torah keepers—people with totally different ways of life—all be under one roof and become one people?

Turn to Ephesians chapter 2:11

Let's Look at the Historical & Cultural Context

- **Major commercial and religious hub**
- **Temple of Artemis:** Pagan center of life in Ephesus. One of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. Many Gentiles saved from that background.
- **Role of women:** Artemis was a goddess of fertility & Women were a major part of the temple practices, and involved many prominent rich and powerful women.
- **Jewish presence** was real but a minority—synagogue there, Acts 18–19.
- *****HOMEWORK ALERT!!*****

Read Acts 18-21 to learn more context about Ephesus and Paul's writings concerning it.

- **Lett's Look at Timothy's story:** Traveled with Paul and left there to help the church. Mixed heritage (His mother Eunice was Jewish, Father was Greek), pastoring a divided church, eventually gave his life for the gospel in Ephesus (Acts of Timothy 5th century)
- **Also gives background to the letters to Timothy (1&2 Tim).** That is where Paul talks about women worrying more about their character and acting from love, rather than focused on the way they dress and look – which was probably directly related to the way women in the temple presented themselves (several 1st & 2nd Century sources wrote about Pliny the Elder and others).
- And this also is the context where Paul suggested to Timothy to not let women speak and teach. because of their second hand knowledge of the scriptures. There was a very heavy influence of Artemis worship that would creep in.

However, as the Jews and Gentiles came together under one roof, what was the dividing factor?

Surprisingly it wasn't Artemis worship. Paul names it. He points to it. And then says something radical:

Jesus destroyed it

GOD:

Ephesians 2:11-22

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,^[a] 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^[a] the Spirit.

The “Dividing Wall of Hostility”

has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances,

- **Literal wall** in the Temple separating Jews from Gentiles (soreg).
- Archaeologists found an actual sign from the Temple that said, ‘No foreigner may enter on pain of death.’

- **Acts 21:** Paul arrested for allegedly bringing a Gentile into the Temple—shows how deep the hostility ran.
- Paul uses it metaphorically for the **Law of commandments expressed through ordinances**
- **Ordinances?** —specifically *civil*, *ceremonial* and *ritual* laws that separated the Jews from gentiles and **set Israel apart**.
- But **in Christ**, the wall is torn down.
- So Timothy because he is a mix of Jew and Gentile, was an embodiment of what Paul is preaching – Two made one!
- Regarding the law, it's noteworthy that in chapter 2, Paul essentially affirms the good works in verse 10, which is arguably parallel to the moral parts of the law, and here he addresses the parts of the law of Moses that kept gentiles out.

And now Paul makes his most daring claim yet—not just that the wall is gone, but that you belong inside it!

You Are No Longer Strangers

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,^[d] 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^[e] the Spirit.

- The Gentiles are to come near – but another step, Paul says:
- You don't visit God's house anymore. You *are* the house
- Gentiles were excluded from the covenants, promises, and citizenship.

- Now brought near as aliens (meaning immigrants)—**fellow citizens, family members, living stones** in God's new Temple.

Unity isn't a preference – it's the proof the Gospel is real.

YOU:

- If we can't do church together, why should the world believe we'll live forever together?
- When we divide over preferences, politics, or pride—we **deny** the power of the gospel to make us one.
- The world is watching. John 13:35 – “By this everyone will know you're My disciples—if you love one another.”
 - Repent of pride, bitterness, or superiority.
 - Reach across the aisle when you feel divisions
 - Stop building new walls Christ already tore down!

In every other group, you have to fit in to belong. In the Church, you belong first—and God shapes you into who you were meant to be.

WE:

- Jesus didn't just save us from something. He saved us **into something**—a people, a purpose, a home.
- It's where strangers become family.
- It's where we don't just go to church—we are the church.
- We think unity is fragile. Paul says it's *finished*. Our job isn't to create it—it's to *preserve* what Christ already secured
- God thought the Church was worth the blood of His Son.

- We don't treat going to church like a side project – being part of the family of God isn't optional – it's essential! It's the entire purpose that God elected and predestined to build from the beginning!
- Jesus died to bring salvation and unity to all of humanity literally building it brick by brick by grace through faith.

GOSPEL:

- Maybe today you feel like an outsider when it comes to the church. You may feel like there's a wall between you and God, or between you and others. The good news is: Jesus didn't just tear down the wall. He made a way for you to come in. **Not by earning it. Not by fixing yourself. But by grace. Through faith.** There's no magic words, only you placing your faith and trust into Jesus: to be brought near, to be forgiven, to become part of His family.

Let's pray.

Father, thank You for tearing down the wall that once separated us from You and from each other.

Make us a people who don't just receive grace—but reflect it in how we love one another.

Help us build a church where no one stands alone and where unity is more than a word—it's our witness.

Fill us with Your Spirit to live as Your dwelling place in the world.

And send us out to be peacemakers, bridge-builders, and kingdom people—united in Christ.

Amen.

- **Benediction**

We see and hear about churches that preach a version of Christianity that only works with people who vote like you, worship like you, or look like you—it's not the gospel.

Unity doesn't mean we think alike—it means we love alike.

Church matters. Unity matters. And in a divided world, being this building of love, with Jesus as the cornerstone, is worth building together. Let's be that kind of church this week, May the lord bless you.