
Ephesians

The Third Race (2:11-18)

Kent Hughes told a story about John Reed, who drove a school bus in Australia. The bus carried both whites and aborigines. The boys were constantly fussing and fighting. Finally, John had heard all the bickering he could stand between the boys. He stopped the bus on the side of the road and said to the white boys, “What color are you?”

“White.”

John said, “No, you are green. All the boys who ride on this bus are green. Now, what color are you?”

The white boys answered, “Green.”

Then John spoke to the aborigines and said, “What color are you?”

“Black,” they said.

“No, you are green. All the boys who ride on this bus are green. Now, what color are you?”

The aborigines answered, “Green.”

That seemed to bring an end to the bickering and fussing—for a while. Several miles down the road, one of the boys said to the others, “All right, light green on this side of the bus, dark green on that side.” Then the fussing started all over again.

Although his solution did not last, the bus driver knew what was needed. The situation on that bus called for a new race, with no color distinctions being made—no blacks or whites, just greens.¹ In order for people to live in har-

mony, no distinctions must be made.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians speaks about the creation of a new race. It proclaims that Jesus came into the world to create this new race.

Years after Paul wrote the Book of Ephesians, Clement of Alexandria, a Christian from the second century, referred to this new race in one of his writings: “We who worship God in a new way, as the third race, are Christians.”²

Christians are a third race. We are God’s new community, God’s new society.

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—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. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 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, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father (2:11-18).

¹Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990), 92-93.

²Clement of Alexandria, quoted in Hughes, 93.

If we could capture in one statement the basic affirmation of this passage, it might be this: *Jesus intends for Christians to understand that they represent a new race of people.*

WE GROW IN OUR APPRECIATION OF THE NEW RACE BY REMEMBERING OUR PAST

Why should any of us get excited over this talk about a new race? The answer is found in verses 11 and 12. Our appreciation for the new race grows as we remember the old life. One word describes that life—alienation. The old life involved alienation from God and from other people.

This world is not a one-for-all-and-all-for-one place, is it? People in this world do not get along. Strife exists between nations. In our big cities, gangs mark off their territorial boundaries and kill those who cross them. In our homes, domestic struggles abound. The spiraling divorce rate gives evidence of this. Even in the church, lines are drawn and some people are cut off from others. Alienation characterizes our world.

Paul addressed this problem. Christianity does not dodge the issue of people's failure to get along with one another. In fact, Paul saw Christianity as meeting this issue head on. In the world of Paul's day, two groups of people were completely alienated from one another: the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews nicknamed the Gentiles the "uncircumcised." They meant that designation to mock and ridicule an entire race. It is said that a prominent rabbi, when asked why God created so many Gentiles, replied, "So there might be fuel enough for the fires of Gehenna [hell]."³

The hostility between these two groups was so intense that it was unlawful for a Jew to help a Gentile who was giving birth, thus helping to bring another Gentile into the world. If a Jew married a Gentile, the loss to the Jewish family was likened to a death, and the Jew's family would hold a funeral. When a Jew entered Palestine, he would shake the dust off his feet so that the dirt of Gentiles would not contaminate the Holy Land. Such was the Jewish hatred toward

Gentiles. For Gentiles, the feeling was mutual; they despised Jews.

Paul wrote to Christians who were Gentiles, who knew from childhood that they were despised by the Jews, and who themselves had once hated every Jew. Paul sent this letter to let these Gentile Christians know that they had become part of a new race which included both Jews and Gentiles. Within this new race, all racial hatred, dislike, and mistreatment was to end.

Ephesians 2:11, 12 also speaks about the end of the alienation between human beings and God. Verse 12 gives a fivefold description of the Gentile alienation from God.

1. "You were . . . separate from Christ." The Gentiles did not know that all history found its meaning and purpose in Jesus Christ.

2. "You were . . . excluded from the commonwealth of Israel." The Gentiles did not receive the natural citizenship rights that belonged by birth to the descendants of Abraham.

3. "You were . . . strangers to the covenants of promise." They were on the outside looking in.

4. "You were . . . [without] hope." They had no hope because they did not have Christ.

5. "You were . . . without God." They did not know God. They had no real relationship with Him.

Glenn Owen had a touching experience during a trip he made to Russia. He told about meeting a woman in Kiev. She held a Bible in her hands and said to Glenn, "I hold the hope of the world in my hands." He shared his reaction to what she said:

. . . I looked at her with a tightness in my throat. . . . There was a sadness in her voice, a sadness in her eyes, a sadness in her heart. But there was in this sweet lady a spirit of hope. There burned in her battered heart the flame of hope that always burns in those who are open to God. She knew, as she gently caressed the Bible, that she held the reason for her hope. . . .

Our tears joined hers as we heard her story and shared her pain. Her only son had died just eighteen months before from the radiation poisoning from the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Her husband had died from inadequate medical treatment only three months before. Now she had come looking for comfort and hope.

. . . This gentle and quiet Ukrainian woman knew that her hope resided in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Her government had failed her. Life in a certain sense had failed her. The lives of those she had loved the most were gone.

³Bob Hendren, *Chosen for Riches: A Life-Related Exposition of Ephesians* (Austin, Tex.: Journey Books, 1978), 49.

Alone, she had no human resource to depend on. She had no reason, except Jesus, to hope. He is the only hope for any of us.⁴

Before Jesus we were all without hope, but Jesus turned our lives around. He offers this hope to any person who turns to Him. Just when you wonder, “What’s the use?”—just when life seems to be going no place at all—Jesus comes along and changes everything.

Notice how Paul affirmed this in verse 13: “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Consider what this passage says, for being “in Christ Jesus” makes all the difference. “In Christ Jesus” describes the new race. It is a community of people brought into being “by the blood of Christ.”

When we think of what our lives would have been like without the difference that Jesus has made, we all should thank and praise God that Jesus made the sacrifice to give us hope. We grow in our appreciation of the new race by remembering our past lives.

WE OWE OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE NEW RACE TO OUR LORD

We owe our participation in the new race completely, fully, and entirely to Jesus. He alone is the one who made the new race possible. How did Jesus do this? Examine the verbs in verses 15 and 16.

To begin with, Jesus made the third race possible “by *abolishing* in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances.” Jesus did away with the Jewish religion.

Jesus made it clear that Christianity is the only way to God. He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6). Peter said, “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Jesus did not die to perpetuate separation and alienation from others on the basis of religion. He died to bring an end to religious division.

Notice what else Jesus did. The latter part of verse 15 says, “In Himself He might *make* the

two into one new man, thus establishing peace.” Not only did He abolish something, but He created something. What did Jesus intend to create? He came to create in Himself *one new man*. The word “new” is important. Two Greek words are translated as “new.” *Neos* means “new” in time. Something is new if it came into existence recently. A second Greek word, *kainos*, means “new” in quality. Something is new in this sense if it has changed or improved to such an extent that it seems completely different.⁵

In verse 15 Paul used this second word for “new.” He wanted Christians to realize that Jesus came to create a “new man”—a quality of human existence not known before—a new race.

Verse 16 gives us a third action word, or verb, associated with Jesus. It tells us what goal Jesus had in mind by creating the “one new man.” Paul said it was to “reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.”

Jesus did this at the cross. He reconciled the third race—the new humanity, the one body—to God. He brought God and man back together. Jesus also brought men back together with men.

Robert Louis Stevenson told a story about two unmarried sisters who shared a one-room apartment. Eventually, the cramped living space caused them to get on each other’s nerves. One day they had a heated discussion on religion. Their irritation grew so severe, and they made so many hateful comments to one another, that they would not even speak to one another after that argument.

Days grew into months. They continued living with each other in silence. Neither had enough money to get another apartment, so they stayed in the one room, never speaking to each

⁵*Kainos* “denotes ‘new,’ of that which is unaccustomed or unused, not ‘new’ in time, recent, but ‘new’ as to form or quality, of different nature from what is contrasted as old.” *Neos* “signifies ‘new’ in respect of time, that which is recent; it is used of the young, and so translated, especially the comparative degree ‘younger’; accordingly what is *neos* may be a reproduction of the old in quality or character. *Neos* and *kainos* are sometimes used of the same thing, but there is a difference, as already indicated. Thus the ‘new man’ in Eph. 2:15 (*kainos*) is ‘new’ in differing in character; . . . but the ‘new man’ in Col. 3:10 (*neos*) stresses the fact of the believer’s ‘new’ experience, recently begun, and still proceeding.” W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, “new,” *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 430–31.

⁴Glenn Owen, “Undying Spirit of Hope,” *Upreach Magazine* (January–March 1994), 3.

other. They drew a chalk line on the floor to separate their domains. For years they hated each other and never said a word to one another. At night each went to sleep as she listened to the breathing of the other, who had become the enemy. They lived in that miserable circumstance for the rest of their lives.

That happens not only in literature; it happens also in real life. I have even seen it in congregations. We might not actually draw chalk lines on the floor, but the lines are still there. People who wear the name of Christ have little or nothing to do with one another. Feelings of being spiritually superior to others prevail.

I can tell you based on the authority of God's Word that when hostility or separation or division exists in the body of Christ, it goes against everything for which Jesus died. Jesus came to reconcile—to create a single, new, unified humanity.

CONCLUSION

Humanity outside of Jesus is a mess. The evening news, the morning newspaper, and per-

sonal experience ought to be enough to make any of us see that our world specializes in separation, alienation, and hostility. It is an "every-man-for-himself" world without Jesus.

In sharp contrast, the church needs to be a place of peace. Christ calls upon His church to be a place devoted to mending broken relationships, to be a place of acceptance, to be a place of reconciliation, and to represent a new race.

To achieve this, we need to think very seriously about some matters.

We will never understand Christianity until we begin to appreciate just how important this new race is to Jesus. The body of Christ is where Christianity is lived.

We do not understand Christianity if we cannot see a problem in letting barriers exist within the local church. A local church ought to be a place where we all work at erasing the chalk lines. A congregation of the Lord's church must accept people, embrace people, and love people. Anyone who is in the church should experience what can never be found on the outside—a race of people who believe that there is a place for everyone and that everyone belongs. ❧

©Copyright, 1995, 1998 by Truth for Today
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED