

**Connection with Unit Theme:** To complement the small group study *When Races Collide*.

**Introduction:** The Sumerian's Amorite Wall. The Long Walls of Athens. The Great Wall of Gorgan. Hadrian's Wall. The Great Wall of China. The Walls of Constantinople. The Berlin Wall. These seven great border walls have been erected by humans for defensive purposes, primarily to keep people out. While not as grand or as visible, people today are still building walls for self-preservation and personal defense.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians of a different kind of dividing wall. This wall was an invisible religious and theological wall but was accomplishing the same purpose as one constructed with brick and mortar. This dividing wall created a massive threat to the infant church. It divided people and separated people into two distinct groups: Jews and Gentiles. People from both groups believed in Jesus. As often happens in segregated groups, Jews looked upon the Gentiles as second-class citizens. Gentiles thought of the Jews as traditionalists who didn't understand the new world. This was not good nor was it the answer to Jesus' prayer for unity in the church.

Paul addressed this potential for disaster with a picture of the new church. But first, he had to remind them of their life in Christ. Paul employed time-related words to speak of the status of the Ephesian believers: "Remember" (the past), "Now" (in the present), and "Then" (in the future).

### 1. Remember the past. (vv. 11-13)

We all have a past. And, for some, the past is filled with regret, remorse, and shame. While we would like to go back and have a "do-over," we can't. That past can destroy us or define us. While we can never relive our past, we can redeem our past.

Paul reminded the Ephesians of their past. He was exhaustive. He left no stones unturned. He unearthed it all. He reminded them that they were Gentiles (not Jewish), uncircumcised (cut off from the covenant), and without Christ (spiritually lost). As a result, they were excluded from Jewish citizenship, foreigners living in unfamiliar territory, without hope, and without God.

John Stott wrote, "Before coming to Jesus, Gentiles were Christ-less, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless." It was not a pretty picture. They were doomed.

*Lighthouse Digest* publishes a list of lighthouses in danger of being lost forever. It's called their "Doomsday List." They alert people of the need to save these historic lighthouses.

In a sense, Paul said these Ephesians once were on a "Doomsday List" because of their past, being separated and excluded from God's fellowship. And, they are not the only ones. We were all born lost and spiritually separated from God.

## 2. Now in the present. (vv. 13-19)

Paul reminded his hearers that the past is past. William Shakespeare wrote in his play *The Tempest*, “What’s past is prologue.” (This quotation is engraved on the National Archives Building in Washington, DC.) Shakespeare’s character, Antonio, used it to suggest that all that has happened before that time, the “past,” has led to the present.

The Ephesians’ past would not dictate their present. “But now,” Paul reminded his readers that the present was different. It has been made new. And the one that made it new is Jesus Christ. The Gentiles were in the past far from God, but have now been brought to God through Jesus Christ.

Paul provided a sterling reminder of all that Jesus had done for them:

- He brought peace. Without Christ, we are at war with God. Jesus is our peace. His peace becomes our peace. His peace is personal and practical. Because of him, we have peace with God, the peace of God, and peace with others. How?
- He tore down the dividing wall of hostility. When Christ enters a heart, the barriers crumble. The Temple had an actual wall that prevented non-Jews from entering the Temple courts. In Christ, that wall was destroyed. Spiritually, all people are separated from God. But because of Jesus’ atoning work on the cross, the barrier has been removed. We now can come into relationship with him. And, because Jesus tore down the wall so all people can go to him, we, too, tear down the walls that separate people.
- He brought the two races together as one. In Jesus, all people are the same. There is no ethnic, religious, nationality, or color barriers. Because believers have entered into a relationship with Jesus, we are one. A new humanity is found in the church. Believers gather because of their common faith in Christ. Those in the church are no longer Jews or Gentiles, they are Christians. If there is one place on this planet where people can live in harmony and peace with one another, it must be in the church. How will the world believe that Jesus brings peace with God if we cannot live at peace with one another?
- He reconciled them to God. Reconciliation is the act of bringing two opposing parties together. That is what Jesus has done for us. He mediated the transaction that would make possible for us to have a relationship with God. Consequently—
- He granted access to God. Now, all believers have access to God. We have a green light that allows us to come into God’s presence. It’s a fantastic privilege made possible by Jesus’ kindness and grace.

## 3. Then in the future. (vv. 19-22)

The past has been redeemed, and the present has been restored, the future is reborn. Paul described a new day for Gentiles and Jews, the new believers. One where no division exists, no rank matters, no status has influence, no distinction is present. Instead, the new church will be one where every believer has equal status and equal privilege. A new citizenship among believers is present. A new family emerges. A new covenant is established. A new race is created.

This new church was built on the work of the apostles and prophets. Jesus himself became the cornerstone—bringing the two walls together, setting everything right. The church is a living, vibrant, organic, growing organism. Christ holds it together. The spirit inhabits it. It is a place reflecting its founder—one of mercy and forgiveness. It knows no race division and no political separation and no socio-economic partition. There is oneness, unity, community.

**Conclusion:** The future of the church will be determined by people today understanding where they have come from—their past; recognizing who they are now in Christ—their

present; and, moving forward in unity and reconciliation—their future. The church of tomorrow must be one of harmony, unity, diversity, multi-ethnic, multi-generational. This is the church Jesus envisioned. This is the one he died for. This is the one he established.

The church of the future will be a community of believers brought together by God's love and a common mission.

May the church embody the words of John Fawcett:

Bless be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.

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