

Brought Near by the Blood Ephesians 2:11-13

Introduction

John Piper grew up in Greenville, SC in the 50s. Growing up during that period he saw much of the practices that fueled the Civil Rights movement of Martin Luther King and others.

He writes: 'When I was nine years old in Greenville, the enforced segregation was almost absolute: drinking fountains, public restrooms, public schools, public swimming pools, bus seating, housing, restaurants, hospital waiting rooms . . . and with their own kind of enforcement – churches, including mine. I can tell you from the inside that, for all the rationalized glosses, it was not 'separate but equal'. It was not respectful, it was not just, it was not loving, and therefore it was not Christian . . . and because of my complicity I have much to be sorry about.'

[Bloodlines, p. 32]

It was sin on a social scale

Today – we still see lingering friction between races on a societal level

Just recently I read an AP news article about a police officer who was acquitted in the shooting death of a black teenager. The article caught my attention because it had the traditional – cop kills unarmed black man – headline.

As you read the story – you find out the police officer pulled over a car with several black youths – the car was similar to one seen involved in a drive-by shooting that night. When pulled over – the suspects made a run for it. The police officer shot one of the teenagers – who was not technically armed – but two guns were found in the car – he had bullets in his pockets. i.e. – he was up to no good.

The sad and frustrating thing is that – the color of your skin – is likely to determine how you react to such a story like that. The same facts - - - but different responses.

Such is the state of race relations in America

John Piper: 'Satan is called the god of this world . . . There is little doubt that where maddeningly hopeless, sinful, self-destructive behaviors and structures hold sway over large groups of people - white or black, left or right - the Devil is deeply at work. The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers.'

What is the solution to such issues?

Are government programs / legislation / going to fix the problem - - - not likely
Perhaps advocating personal responsibility – telling people to quit breaking the law – they are less likely to get shot by a police officer

In the end – we continue to face deep-rooted problems associated with racial division and distrust

Piper: 'the human race - and every ethnic group in it - is united in this great reality: we are all depraved and condemned. We are all lost in the woods together, sinking on the same boat, dying of the same disease.' [Bloodlines, p. 135]

As we look around at our world and our nation – we see a divided world. It is divided along nationalities, racial divisions, social classes, ethnicities, etc.

Scripture tells us that one of the reasons we find separation and division between men is that there is a separation and division between man and God

Isaiah 59:2 - 'Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God. And your sins have hidden His face from you . . .'

Because man is not in a right relationship with God – he also is not in a right relationship with others

With all of our divisions today – none were as severe as the divisions between Jew and Gentile in the first century

The pious Jew would refer to Gentiles as dogs - - - he would not eat with Gentiles or enter a Gentile home

When leaving Gentile land – a Jew would often shake the dust off of his feet

Some Pharisees were known to pray: 'God – I thank you that I am not a Gentile.'

Yet – in the church – something amazing took place
Jew and Gentile were brought together in Christ – to worship the same Lord and Savior

Paul begins to deal with this amazing reality of the gospel – in Ephesians 2:11-13

The gospel comes to us and says that we all fell together – there is none righteous - - - Jew and Gentile alike / black and white – etc.

But God demonstrated His love towards us – in that while we were yet sinners – Christ died for us

The gospel where truly embraced still holds the only hope – is the only truly unifying force in this world - - - where diverse people groups can be brought to live together in harmony - - - because they bow to the same Lord and Savior

I. Jews and Gentiles - vv. 11, 12

Here Paul introduces the division between Jew and Gentile

You have the circumcision / the uncircumcised

Circumcision was given by God to Abraham as a sign of the covenant – but it came to be used in derogatory way to those outside the covenant

The uncircumcised was a term of reproach – referring to those outside of God's covenant

God's purpose was for the Jews to be a light in the world – to make God known thru their obedience to Him

MLJ: 'God did not create the nation of the Jews in order to have nothing to do with the others; He created the nation of the Jews in order that through them He might speak to the whole world. But the Jew had misunderstood. He had turned the difference into a barrier, and he held himself aloof and despised the others. The Circumcision - the Uncircumcision!'

Jew and Gentile were divided – they viewed the world differently

They didn't sit down and have lunch together – we saw Peter wrestle with that issue in Galatians

Similar to whites and blacks in the 50s – we don't drink from the same water fountain / etc.

The Jew was given spiritual privilege by God

He chose Abraham – and the nation of Israel – to be His people

He sent His prophets to the people of Israel

They had the Ten Commandments – to display the wisdom of God in their practices

They had the covenants / the priesthood / the tabernacle

They had all the Messianic promises

It would be thru their line that the Messiah would come – and thru Him all the nations would be blessed

Klyne Snodgrass: 'the privilege Israel enjoyed was real; the arrogance and disdain were a failure.'

There are a couple places where we see how things worked rightly in what was a temporary arrangement

Rahab the Harlot – identifies with the nation of Israel – is spared during the conquest of the land of Canaan – found a place in the genealogy of Christ

Ruth 1:16 - - - Ruth – a Moabite – she expressed her faith – she expressed solidarity with the people of Israel and so with their God – [the two were bound up together]

This place of priority of position in the OT – for Israel was real

Amos 3:2 - 'You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth.'

If you wanted to draw near to God as a Gentile – you had to come thru the Jewish nation

You didn't go to the Babylonians to discover truth
You didn't go to the Assyrians or the Egyptians to find the one true God
God made no covenants with those nations

They were all idol worshipers / polytheistic with their many gods

That is similar to what you would have found in Ephesus of the first century – among the Gentiles

Paul is calling the Ephesians to remember what they came out of

These are the ones who burned their magic books

They were into occult practices / spells / crafts
They had a temple to the goddess Artemis / Diana in their city
They believed in Zeus and Hermes and Apollos / etc.

They didn't know God – they were pagans living in a pagan culture

Paul says, 'remember where you came from!'

You had no spiritual closeness to God – you were all wrapped up in error and folly

Now – grace has come to them

It's important to remember where we came from – to live rightly in the present - - - to have a proper appreciation of grace

People who revel in grace walk in humility and trust
They are humbled that God should show such mercy to them – and they want to obey Him
They are filled with gratitude towards God

That's why Paul says, 'Remember where you came from'

I saw the movie, 'Unplanned this week'

It is the story of Abby Johnson – who was a Planned Parenthood director and became a pro-life advocate

In her book, *The Walls Are Talking*, Abby remembers what God saved her from - - - she says she relates to Mary Magdalene: "I have also done my fair share of sinning. And I have also been forgiven much more than I deserve. I abused and betrayed women in the worst possible way. I convinced them to kill their children....It was Christ who changed me."

She remembers where she came from – it is a story of grace

She had been far from God – blind to her own sin and complicit in the murder of unborn

Her eyes were opened in a powerful way – when she was called in to assist an abortion doctor – who wanted to use the ultrasound to perform the procedure on a 13 week old fetus

She saw the baby trying to move away from the suction tube - - - the wickedness of the whole process finally hit her like a ton of bricks [this is killing a baby]

When Paul says, 'remember where you came from' – the Ephesians were far from God – in paganism

We might compare the contrast between Jew and Gentile to the privilege between growing up in a Christian home versus an unbelieving home

The child from the unbelieving home – is not taken to church/ ss / - no bible camp - - - he has no bible / he hears no prayer - - - he hears swear words from day one / he has little moral instruction / he is free to run loose and hook up with whatever moral reprobates of society he finds at hand

It is a great disadvantage spiritually - - - but God in His grace can overcome those barriers

By God's grace – these Ephesians – these pagan idol worshipers were brought near - - - they were saved by grace thru faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ

When Jesus came on the scene – He began to point out how God always had a heart for Gentiles – and the Jews misunderstood their privileges - - - they got mad at Him

Jesus points to this truth of the inclusion of Gentiles

Luke 4:25–30

Piper: 'Out of the blue, He tells a story about God's passing over all the ethnic Jews to bring a miraculous blessing to an ethnic and political foreigner - a Gentile from the land of Sidon. And He does this blatantly and forcefully and

without softening or explanation: there were many widows in Israel, and God blessed a foreigner. That's what He said.'

He was showing the Jews that God loved Gentiles as well

Jesus brought into play a new way of defining the people of God

***Faith in Jesus is more important than ethnicity / outward ceremony

People who identify and trust in Jesus – are the people of God - - - not the circumcised / not black or white / Jew or Greek - - - it's those who believe

There is circumcision of the flesh / a physical sign of ethnic Israel

True circumcision is of the heart – *Gal. 5:6 / 6:15*

John Piper once met with a Jewish Rabbi in the Minneapolis area. They had lunch together and the Rabbi summed up his position.

Piper: 'The rabbi: God has two plans to bless people. One is the Jewish covenant, and the other is the Christian covenant. Jews do not have to be Christians to be accepted by God, and Christians do not have to be Jews in order to be accepted by God. Both can get to God their own way – with Jesus [for Christians] or without Jesus [for Jews] . . . that is the opposite of what Ephesians 2:11-12 is saying.'

Paul taught that if a Jewish man did not come to trust in Christ for salvation – his circumcision was of no value - - - faith in Jesus is what matters

Frank Thielman: 'Prior to the *Gospel's* entrance onto the scene, the Jews had enormous religious advantages over the *Gentiles* . . . but after the *Gospel's* advent and the inclusion of *Gentiles* within God's newly constituted people, these advantages were overshadowed by the rejection of the gospel among most Jews and their perpetuation of social distinctions that God, through the gospel, had abolished.'

Paul says to Gentiles – who found themselves at a distance from the Jews - - - they have now been brought near to God by the blood of Jesus

II. Jesus Changes Everything - v. 13

Paul is pointing to the great truth that not only are Gentiles reconciled to God thru the gospel - - - but they are brought together with Jews in one body – the body of Christ – the church

It is one of the glories of the gospel – that God will take people from such diverse backgrounds and ethnicities and draw them together at the throne of grace – to give forth a multi-ethnic chorus of praise

In heaven – there will be people from every tribe and tongue and nation

Rev. 5:9 - 'They sang a new song saying, 'Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.'

Barriers of race and ethnicity will not be an issue amongst God's glorified and redeemed humanity - - all will center on the praise and glory of the Lamb

The church is privileged to reflect that now as we bow before the same Lord – in harmony with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ

Conclusion

Sidney Poitier was a successful African American actor – recalled an incident where he was in Atlanta to promote a film he was in – the year was 1955

He was interviewed by black newspapers / and spoke on black radio stations

When he was done – he to eat at a very nice restaurant. At the entrance – he met the maître d who said: 'I can give you a table but we'll have to put a screen around you.'

'What do you mean?' – 'Well – it's the practice here – it's the law'

Poitier replied with: 'no thank you'

The irony of placing a screen / separating off one man from the others fails to recognize that - - We have all fallen together – in Adam

There is none righteous – no not one

But - - - We have been brought near thru the blood of Christ

Romans 5:8 - 'God demonstrates His great love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.'

Paul says, 'remember that – and live in light of God's grace' – walk humbly with your God