

Week 5 - “Kingdom Hybridity” (Ephesians 2.12-22)

In the second half of chapter 2, Paul teaches that the cross of Jesus does more than just reconcile people to God, it also reconciles people groups to one another. Namely, Jesus’s life of self-sacrificial love shows us the way to peace and tears down the divisions between people of different cultures. The Way of Jesus creates an entirely new kind of human community. But, multiethnic churches might fall into the trap of thinking “multiculturalism” is what this text prescribes. What if, instead of multiculturalism, this text prescribes cultural hybridity rooted in our shared identity in Jesus? What would the potential pitfalls be? What would be some concrete pathways to such cultural hybridity?

Group Discussion Questions

Read Ephesians 2, verses 11 through 13

- Paul begins this portion of the passage with two categories into which people are divided in the church: “uncircumcised” and “the circumcision.” This was a way that Jewish Jesus-disciples talked about themselves over and against non-Jewish (i.e. Gentile) Jesus-disciples. **What are some of the ways modern-day Jesus-disciples categorize ourselves over and against one another?**
- Paul describes the Gentile Jesus-disciples as newcomers to the covenants of promise. He uses an analogy to depict their relationship to it: the Gentiles were like “foreigners,” “excluded from citizenship.” But because of Jesus, Gentiles have been welcomed in. **What would change about our practice of faith if we who aren’t Jewish viewed ourselves as newcomers to God’s covenant?**
- **Who do you think still feel like outsiders to Christian community? What would it look like to welcome them in?**

Read verses 12 through 18

- In describing a “dividing wall” that separates Jewish people from Gentiles, Paul is alluding to the courts of the Jerusalem temple into which Gentiles were prohibited entrance. Imagine being a non-Jewish Jesus-disciple and realizing that you were excluded from accessing God’s presence because of the ethnicity you were born with. **What does it mean for us that the “dividing wall” has been “destroyed” by Jesus?**
- Paul uses the word “peace” three times in verses 14 through 18. In Hebrew (the language of the Old Testament scriptures Paul studied intensely) the word for peace is a much richer concept than merely the absence of conflict. *Shalom* is the presence of wholeness, harmony, right-relatedness between people. **In light of this richer concept of peace, what does it mean that Jesus has made “peace” between Jews and Gentiles in the church?**
- In Jesus’s earthly ministry, he often had to set aside the letter of the Jewish law (Torah) in order to demonstrate love to those on the margins. **Can you think of an example of when Jesus “set aside the law with its commands and regulations” in order to obey the higher law of love?**
- It wasn’t that long ago that laws in the United States segregated people of different “races.” **What would it look like for you to set aside the letter of the law to create shalom?**

“We need to adopt the belief that to be a follower of Christ means to care deeply about and pursue other followers of Christ, including the ones that we don’t instinctively value or like. [This entails] allowing our identity as members of the body of Christ to trump all other identities. [It also entails] commitment to the body of Christ above our own identity and self-esteem needs. We’ve coped with our divisions long enough. It’s time for us to discover our true identities as members of the family of God. It’s time for us to rally around this identity, overcome our divisions and change the world.”

— Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ*, p.97-98.

- Paul says that Jesus’s purpose was the create “one new humanity” in the body of Christ. One way to approach this would be “multiculturalism.” **What has been your experience with multiethnic and multicultural churches? What were the benefits? What were the drawbacks?**
- This language of “one new humanity” can lead some to think the only identity that matters is our identity as members of Christ’s body. **What are some of the potential pitfalls of this approach?**

“The idea of a common in-group identity that trumps all subordinate identities might seem to suggest that we should all relinquish our cultural identities and ignore our cultural differences. However, to do this would violate the metaphor of the body of Christ, in which each group expresses its unique perspective and function in coordination with other groups and in submission to the head, Jesus Christ. [...] Culture-blindness is simply disunity disguised; it falls short of the unity to which we have been called.”

— Cleveland, p.187.

- In the U.S., it’s tempting for multiethnic churches to ignore or deny white cultural normativity. **What are some of the ways you’ve seen churches normalize white cultural practices? What are some of the ways you haven’t noticed that certain church practices were culturally white?**
- Brian Bantum suggests a different goal for multiethnic churches: “cultural hybridity.” He also suggests our cultures are more hybridized than we might realize. **In what ways is your culture hybridized? In what does the U.S. have a hybridized culture? In what ways does Roots have a hybridized culture? What would a hybridized and Jesus-centered culture look like?**

Read verses 19 through 22

- In verses 19 through 22, Paul develops the metaphor of a new kind of temple—a temple made up of people of different ethnic and cultural groups, built upon the foundation of the apostles, prophets, and Jesus himself. **What do you think this metaphor has to say about the space we create as a church? Is the space we create inclusive of people of all ethnic and cultural groups? Who do you think or feel is excluded? What would it look like to create a more inclusive space?**
- **What space do you take up in the church or in society? What would it look like for you to follow Jesus’s example, given your social location?**
- **Of the four pathways to Kingdom Hybridity pastor T. C. suggested (i.e. sharing our foods, sharing our stories, sharing communion, and showing up for one another), which do you gravitate to most and why? Which feels the most challenging and why?**