

Eph 2vs13-14 Wall of Separation pt 2--Jesus Removed Spiritual Elitism

Last week, we talked about how both the Jewish people who received the original commission to spread the Good News of a coming messiah largely failed because they put their faith in keeping a set of physical laws, instead of desiring to please the law-giver by living righteous lives, which was the original intent of the law. The law was given to point people to God, helping them understand His Love for them, and also His Righteousness and Holiness, His Justice and, especially in the Prophets, to point them to their coming Messiah, Jesus. A second error that they made, and one that we also make ourselves is by having an attitude of spiritual elitism. There's no place in the Kingdom of God for an "In Crowd" and an "Out Crowd". We are to share the good news of the Gospel to everyone. Jesus died for the whole world, so we should not pick and choose. A substantial portion of Jesus' ministry is spent, as the Gospels record, in taking the Jewish leadership to task regarding this. The Pharisees were both proud, and spiritually elitist, saying that they were "in with God" and looking at others as outside of God's grace and doomed. They shut people out of the kingdom of heaven by their practices. Matthew 23:4 **4 And they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as their finger. And again in Matthew 23:13-15 13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut the kingdom of heaven in front of people; for you do not enter it yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. 16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' 17 You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?** They continually emphasized the physical over the spiritual, works of the flesh over works of the Spirit. The Sadducees were no better Mark 11:17 - **Then Jesus began to teach them, and He declared, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"** . One of the functions of Jesus' teaching was to dismantle that elitism. Not only were they cheating people who were offering sacrifices, they were preventing people from coming closer to God.

14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

There was a physical barrier wall in the Temple separating the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of Israel! And there was a sign posted which stated that any Gentile crossing through would be punished by death. Temple officials were given the right to enforce this ban on foreigners in this sacred space. The seriousness of the offense of Gentiles crossing the barrier is illustrated in the book of Acts. Paul was falsely accused of bringing non-Jews past this enclosure and the mob attempted to kill him (Acts 21:27–32). This is probably why he calls it a wall of hostility! But this was not the way the temple of God was originally organized with strict limits placed on Gentiles, no matter what their dedication to God.

Although the Hebrew Bible states that only the descendants of Aaron could function in a priestly role within the temple (Numbers 18:7), there was no "Court of the Gentiles" in the original Tabernacle Israel was instructed to set up. Gentiles were permitted to pray and sacrifice to God in the same way Israelites did: **For the generations to come, whenever a foreigner or anyone else living among you presents a food offering as an aroma pleasing to the Lord, they must do exactly as you do. The community is to have the same rules for you and for the foreigner residing among you; this is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You and the foreigner shall be the same before the Lord: The same laws and regulations will apply both to you and to the foreigner residing among you (Numbers 15:14-16).** At the dedication of the first temple, in the tenth century BC, King Solomon prayed: **As for the** Breaking down those walls of separation is one of Jesus' missions—symbolized and fulfilled most poignantly by the tearing of the great thick curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place in the temple

when Jesus died. The temple should have been open to all, including gentiles. Paul, the former Pharisee said the same thing: **Gal 3:26-29 - You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.** Rom 9:8 - **So it is not the children of the flesh who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as offspring. Therefore, the "dividing wall" was a cultural one and not a real theological barrier that had been falsely erected. The lesson for us is not to do the same thing by putting barriers up, preventing people from coming to God.** The Bible is filled with examples of "People who shouldn't have been qualified, being qualified and accepted by God. Do we hinder people from pouring themselves fully into the mission of God by giving them subtle messages that we can't use your kind? Do we divide and partition people out with walls of legalism, sectarianism, and Phariseeism?

As Christians, we can be just as spiritually elitist and proud as those Pharisees; doing more to discourage people from entering heaven than encouraging them to follow Jesus. Paul asks the Ephesians to remember their situation before conversion when they were considered uncircumcised by the Jews, lacking the privileges that the Jews enjoyed so that we will appreciate what Jesus has done for us, and so that we will not fall into the trap of legalism, and of trying to save ourselves through our own works, or spiritual elitism—preventing those who don't measure up to our standards from entering the Kingdom of God. God has made it possible for both Jews and Gentiles in Christ to be equal before God, as members of one body, the Church. This does not mean that the nation Israel becomes the church, for Israel still exists as a separate entity apart from the church (Rom 9:1–5). But, our burden should be that as many people as possible, both Jew and Gentile, come to a saving knowledge of Christ. The Jewish people weren't complete failures at being a nation of priests, but they didn't do very well either. And the church isn't a complete failure at being Jesus' hands and feet, but we can do a lot better also. Paul is asking us to learn from the example of Israel, and go out there and fulfill the great commission. Jesus has made a peace possible with God for everyone who will accept Him as Lord and Savior. None of us earned our way in. So, we should help as many people find Jesus as possible.