



## WEEK 2: GOOD FENCES MAKE BAD NEIGHBOURS

A massive issue for the first century church was that of integration/diversity. Never before had the people of God included gentiles from all nations. For the Jews, this struggle was religious, cultural and racial. Having gentiles merge with them in their sacred places of worship was exceptionally uncomfortable and it felt intrinsically wrong. Paul's letters addressed their responses to diversity, explaining how the gospel was now their primary identity, which needed to radically change the way they viewed themselves and others. They needed to grasp the fact that it was the gospel alone that put them, both Jews and Gentiles, into right standing with God.

### TODAY'S TEXTS:

Ephesians 2:8 - 3:10



### 1. WE MUST LOOK TO THE PAST FOR REALITY, EMPATHY AND HUMILITY, BUT NOT FOR IDENTITY

- Read Ephesians 2:11-12

Paul understood that in order to embrace the gospel, it was important for the Gentiles to acknowledge the past. They had never been part of God's people and had been looked down upon. But now they were not only reconciled to God, through Christ, but to the Jews as well. Paul wanted them to really grasp that, so that they could grasp the gravity of what the gospel had done to reconcile people to one another. The scriptures call us to look back at the past, to be reminded of how things were, so that we are able to bring these very struggles under the transforming influence of the gospel. The gospel reminds us that our primary identity is not race, culture or ethnicity, but that we are first and foremost, children of God.

- ❖ Q: Why is it not just foolish, but also unbiblical for us a nation trying to reconcile our people, to ignore the past or just "move on", without properly examining it?
- ❖ Q: Why is it important for us to distinguish between "living in the past" as our identity, and intricately examining the past for our understanding?
- ❖ Q: Why do you think Paul was so big on the fact that though there was major hostility in the past between Jew and Gentile, that this was no longer their primary identity?





## 2. WE MUST LOOK TO CHRIST IN THE PRESENT AND MODEL THIS NEW COMMUNITY OF DIVERSITY

- Read Ephesians 2:13-22

Through the gospel, the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile was completely destroyed, and no longer exists. This means that though we are all different, we are unified because of Christ. All of us together now make up the dwelling place of God, and so in our uniqueness and difference, we express our unity as one new humanity. We are not called to “same-ness” but are called to unity and love within diversity.

- ❖ Q: What is the difference between unity and “same-ness”?
- ❖ Q: Why is it important for us to understand and embrace the freedom in the gospel to be who we are (ethnically & racially etc.) instead of trying to force “same-ness”?
- ❖ Q: How is it possible for us to bring our differences into the church, so that we genuinely reflect the diversity of the gospel, which demonstrates and embraces love and unity through diversity? What do you think this would look like practically for our local church?

## 3. WE MUST LOOK TO THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH FOR HOPE AND CONSIDER THE ROLE WE HAVE TO PLAY

- Read Ephesians 3:1-10

Paul said that the church is God’s chosen method of displaying his wisdom to the heavenlies. This should make us hopeful about what God can and will accomplish through his church. What he has promised, he will certainly deliver. This should cause us to ask ourselves what role we can play in the process. Paul was willing to give up his comfort in order to take the reconciliation message to the gentiles. We are recipients of this gospel that would not have reached us, had he remained in Jerusalem.

- ❖ Q: In what way do we as a church in South Africa right now, have the opportunity to display God’s manifest wisdom to the world?
- *Personal Reflection Q: What is the big take-away for you this week. What changes does God want you to action in your life regarding diversity? What role are you personally going to play?*

