

Division, Hostility, and Enmity vs. Unity

Ephesians 2:11-16

There is so much division today. Dividing people along ethnic, gender, economic, and political lines keeps hostility and enmity high. The enemy's tactic has not changed, but his intensity has broadened. At the time of Christ and of the early church, the primary division was between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews, God's chosen people, had the Law, the Temple, and the visible sign of the promises of Yahweh—circumcision. The Gentiles were outsiders, seen as unclean, and were deemed "the uncircumcised."

Topic: The hatred and hostility, the division and enmity wasn't necessary and it wasn't Yahweh's hope. God always had in mind to extend His promises to the Gentiles. God's promise to Abraham included blessing for Gentiles. Consider the following passages.

Genesis 12:1-3—Yahweh said to Abram, "Go forth from your land, and from your kin and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Genesis 18:17-18—Now Yahweh said, "Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?"

Genesis 22:15-18—Then the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh, because you have done this thing and have not spared your son, your only one, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have listened to My voice."

Isaiah 49:6—(Speaking to God the Son, God the Father says,) "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to cause the preserved ones of Israel to return; I will also give You as a light of the Gentiles so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

-If it is so clear that God's promise was to include the Gentiles, why do you suppose the Jews tried to keep it for themselves and tried to keep the Gentiles out?

-The Law was given only to the Jews, not the Gentiles. How did having it give rise to pride and exclusion?

-Read Ephesians 2:11-16 and Galatians 3:14-29. There is not supposed to be two groups, but one new group—Christians. What divisions do you perceive here at GCC? What among the church universal? How can we better pursue peace and unity among believers in our highly polarized climate?

Association: Do you remember you BC (before Christ) days? Share how you were without hope and without God. This is the problem portion of your testimony.

-How did you come to be in Christ? Share how God brought you near to Himself. This is the solution portion of your testimony.

Everyone has a preferred section of the kingdom. What sort of identifiers do you prefer: conservative, progressive, liberal, political, apolitical, rich, poor, country, urban, Bible students, evangelists, practical servers, musicians, hymn singers, praise singers, doctrine hawks, complainers, etc.?

-Does pride or a tribalism ever creep into your life? Does it ever become 'us vs. them'?

Guidance: Love, peace, and unity should be hallmarks of the Church. What antidotes to division can you think of?

While we might not build physical dividing walls of hostility, as the Jews did at the Temple, we regularly build spiritual walls. Brainstorm ways in which we can tear down the spiritual walls of separation we see at church.

Unity does not require uniformity. Preference and differences can be valuable, but there should only be one approach on things that matter most. A good guiding principle might be: "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity (love)."

-What things are absolutely essential to the faith and that must receive unity?

-What things are non-essential, even if you have a very strong preference?

-How does Ephesians 2:11-16 help us to keep charity center of mind?

Pray for and with each other, asking Yahweh to foster a culture of unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials, and charitable love in all things.