

Union With Christ *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*

Jesus' One New Humanity *Ephesians 2:14 – 16*

Introduction: Where Do You Find the Love?



During this weekend, I have given you some tools – the graph about four types of cultural preference you can have and the graph about four types of racism that we have. These are tools that you can draw on a napkin to have conversation with people, say with your suitemates when they ask you, ‘How was retreat?’ ‘Well, here’s something I learned – what do you think?’ We need these tools to help us have conversations. We need conversations because not enough people come to events. We need your courage and compassion because these conversations are not easy to have. But we need more than tools. We need Jesus. Now, I believe that confronting racism is a spiritual issue. Yet I believe that the God whom I love has been working to heal racial issues for all time. I believe that this is why He showed up personally in the man Jesus, to deal with the fundamental problem we have in human nature. I believe you and I need to know him and have him in the very core of our being. I short, I believe Jesus solves our race problem. I’m going to ask tonight for your partnership. Now is the time to act. I am calling for your partnership. Jesus is calling for your partnership. So in response to what you’ve heard and learned, I’ll ask you to make a next step, a step that is appropriate to you, wherever you are in this journey.

A few years ago, I was speaking at a student leadership conference where there were students from around the New England region. I was making a point about leadership involving risk and sacrifice at times. I was expressing my admiration for Euro-American and African-American Christians who campaigned against the Japanese-American internment, spoke out against it, cared for the Japanese-American community while they were interned, and so on. I had researched this question because my dad wondered if Christians cared, and if the Christian God exists, whether He cared about the internment. I discovered that yes there were such Christians. The point I was making was that Jesus leads his people to stand with the oppressed and speak truth to the oppressor, even when it costs you to do it. As you might guess, this was fairly personal to me. Afterwards, I was having lunch with some of the students. A young man, European American, from Norwich Military Academy in Vermont, came up to me and said, ‘I enjoyed what you said, but I wanted you to know that I wrote a paper in favor of the internment.’ I have to tell you, I was shocked. A bunch of things came into my mind, because I’m quite okay with conflict. What to say? Should I ask, ‘Do you live in the 21st century?’ Should I ask him why historians, lawyers, and politicians look back on that and say it was a big mistake? Should I ask him what he thought about the U.S. already having apologized and given back some restitution? But I remember Jesus just helping me hold my tongue for a few precious seconds. I got a sense in my mind that this young man was psychologically off in some way and that this was not a normal situation. I said calmly, ‘Well, I disagree, but if you’d like to talk about that more, I’d be happy to.’ He said no, and just said that he appreciated my talk. Then he walked away. Later I learned that he was indeed a troubled young man. After learning that, I felt really glad Jesus protected my heart, and helped me respond in a way that de-escalated the situation. This is just one reason why I think you and I need Jesus if we are going to tackle race issues.

In his book, *Strength to Love*, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. writes about coming to Montgomery to lead the bus boycott. Right after the protest, King and his wife got all kinds of phone calls and letters threatening their lives.

After one such phone call, King says, ‘I hung up, but I could not sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point. I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing to be a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had almost gone, I determined to take my problem to [Jesus]. My head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud, ‘...The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left...’ At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, ‘Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.’ ...Three nights later, our home was bombed. Strangely enough, I accepted the word of the bombing calmly. My experience with [Jesus] had given me a new strength and trust. I knew now that [Jesus] is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms and problems of this life.’¹

Relevance:

On Friday night, we’ve touched on the difference between secular multiculturalism and Christian multiculturalism. I think Jesus is the only coherent standard that transcends culture. Jesus is the only motivation we have to engage people of other cultures. On Saturday morning, we talked about how Jesus gives us an identity and purpose that is totally different from that of ‘the system.’ Again, Jesus is at work to undo the biggest problems of systemic injustice, which in the context of the U.S. is, in large part, racial. So if we say yes to Jesus, we are in for the ride of our life with him in making a difference in our world. Now, I’m going to bring into the spotlight what I’ve been implicitly saying all along: Jesus solves our race problem.

Context:

I’m going to read a passage from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In it, Paul the writer says this very thing. This is Ephesians 2:14 – 16.

¹⁴ For he is our peace, who has made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the enmity,
the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in himself he might make the two into one new humanity
thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Jesus Brought Two into One

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– the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in himself he might make **the two into one NEW HUMANITY**
- thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might **reconcile them both** in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

The two groups Paul is talking about are the Jews and the Gentiles, another name for non-Jews. That comes up in each verse here: ‘both groups into one’ in v.14, ‘the two into one new humanity’ in v.15, and ‘reconcile them both in one body’ in v.16. Jesus is the basis for human unity. Now it’s important to point out that what Paul is describing is not just a theory – it was his own experience. For example, when Christian faith started spreading in the old city of Antioch, there were walls in the city dividing each ethnic group from the others. But Christians met in each others’ homes, and other people got confused. They asked, ‘You’re not divided like us. So what should we call you?’ They

¹ King said ‘God’ but I referred to ‘Jesus,’ feeling that the evangelistic context in which I spoke warranted this identification, and that this identification was acceptable from King’s writings.

started calling them Christians at that point, because they worshiped Christ but also because no ethnic label fit (Acts 11:26). Jesus did start a movement uniting Jews and Gentiles.

Israel was Multi-Ethnic

Now if you've taken a Biblical Heritage class, it may surprise you to hear that the God of the Bible would be the solution to our racial issues. You may wonder, 'But God chose one race, the Jewish people, in the Old Testament. That meant everyone else was a Gentile, or non-Jew, by definition. And Jesus was Jewish. How can a God who started a race and a form of exclusive racism resolve race issues? How can a Jesus who comes from that particular race resolve race issues? Isn't he trying to resolve a problem that God Himself started?' And then we think that the biblical God was copying every other ancient society. In ancient societies, each people group had their own gods. The Egyptian people as an ethnic group had their own Egyptian gods. The Babylonian people as an ethnic group had their own Babylonian gods. So we think the biblical God was just making a new ethnic group called Israel, and getting them to worship Him. If that were true, then the biblical God would fundamentally be reinforcing ethnic tensions.

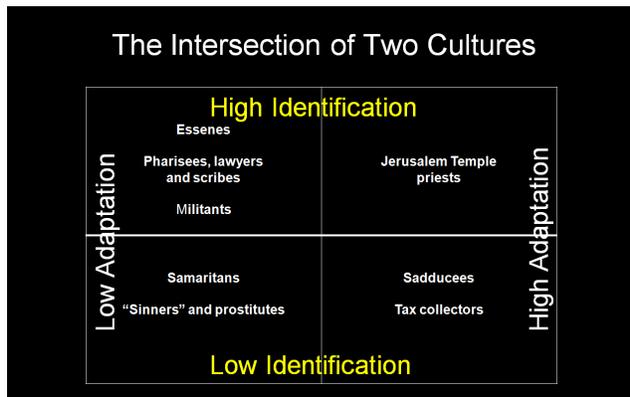
But that's not what He was doing. It may be surprising to you to know that biblically, Israel was neither an ethnicity nor a race. It was a *faith*, not a race. And Judaism did have a certain *culture*, so it was a *faith with a culture*. Leonardo DiCaprio, for example, is dating an Israeli swimsuit model Bar Refaeli, and is thinking about converting to Judaism. If he does, he would become *Jewish*. There you go. You could convert into Judaism and become Jewish. So if that's true, then in what sense is being Jewish a matter of being ethnically or racially related? It's not. So being a part of Israel was not simply whether you were genetically related to Abraham and Sarah (remember Jesus called Zaccheus a 'son of Abraham'), but whether you shared the *faith* of Abraham. When Jesus called Zaccheus 'a son of Abraham' in Luke 19:9, he was talking about Zaccheus' *faith*, not his ethnicity and certainly not his 'race.'

God started something with Abraham and Sarah way back in Genesis 12 that was multi-ethnic. It wasn't that their genetic descendants had some kind of exclusive privilege. Outsiders joined all the time by faith. Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, seems to have learned a critical lesson when an ethnically Canaanite woman named Tamar (Genesis 38:6) became part of his family and eventually bore his two sons. Joseph, another of the twelve sons of Jacob, married a woman who was ethnically Egyptian. Then the whole family of Israel went into Egypt, grew, became enslaved by the Egyptian Pharaoh, and cried out to God. God delivered them out of slavery and out of Egypt. At that time of the Exodus from Egypt, called the Passover, Egyptians actually joined Israel by faith in God. In the book of Exodus, 'a mixed multitude' from Egypt accompanied Israel out during the Exodus (Exodus 12:38) and became part of Israel through circumcision (Exodus 12:43 – 49). Then, God led them through the wilderness under the leadership of Moses. Moses had two very faithful assistants – 'go to' guys – Joshua and Caleb. But Caleb was ethnically Kenizzite, one of the Canaanite tribes (Numbers 32:12; Genesis 15:19)! Caleb was not genetically related to Abraham; he was a Canaanite! And if you know about the tension between the Canaanites and Israel, you know that's amazing. Yet Caleb *became* Jewish. And even though Israel was going into battle with the Canaanites, since the Canaanites sacrificed children to false gods, Canaanites were welcome to join Israel if they worshiped the God of Israel. Did any? Yes. Rahab and her whole household joined Israel (Joshua 6:17 – 25). Then Rahab married Salmon – of the tribe of Judah – and became an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). A few generations later, we know of another woman, Ruth, who was a Moabitess – Moabites were not genetically descended from Abraham and Sarah – who became Jewish and married Boaz, who was of the tribe of Judah (Ruth 4:13), and became another ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Bathsheba the Hittite became a wife of David (2 Samuel 11 – 12) – who was of course of the tribe of Judah – and became an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:6). My point is that biblically, being 'Jewish' was to be a microcosm of all humanity by being a faith. They were an *inclusive faith*. They were not an *exclusive ethnic group*. They were certainly not a *race*.

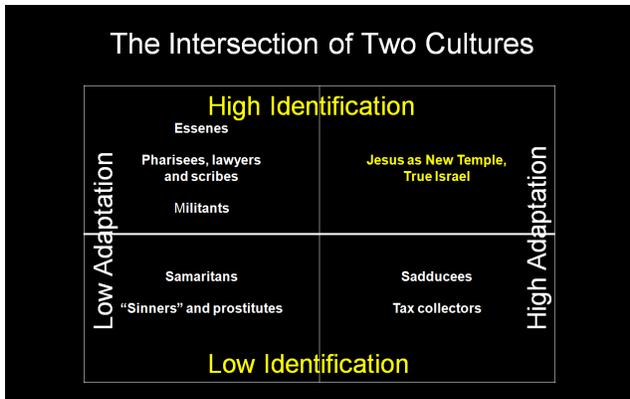
Jesus Came to Create One New Humanity

What does this mean about the biblical God? It means that God has already wanted a multi-ethnic community. He didn't just start doing that with Jesus. It has always been His intention, and He demonstrated that from the beginning. That also means that when God took on human flesh and blood in Jesus, He took on multi-ethnic flesh and blood. Because Jewishness was already a microcosm of all humanity, Jesus himself was a microcosm of all humanity. Why do Christians do evangelism as part of Christian mission? Because Jesus' humanity is for *all humanity*, every human being; and it is Jesus' own multi-ethnic mission to gather *all people* to himself.

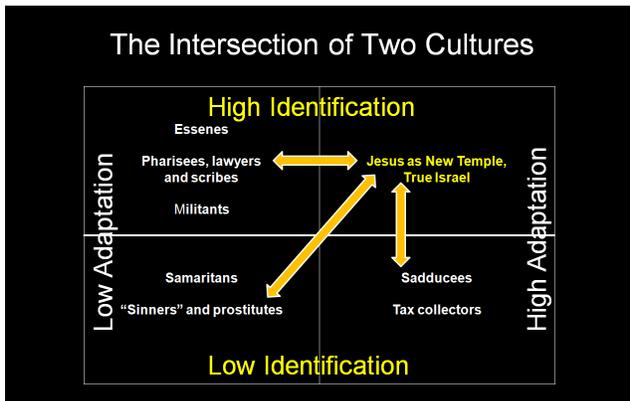
And how did Jesus reach out to both Jews and Gentiles, to make the two into this one new humanity? By being God's one human being for all human beings. Let's draw the 4 quadrants again, but this time let's set it up so that Jewish culture is on one axis, and Greco-Roman culture is on the other.



Being Jewish was a minority position; they were oppressed by the Roman Empire, the majority culture. What were Jesus' options? And what were the options of his Jewish disciples as they navigated these two cultures? In the upper left quadrant, you had Jews who were highly identified with Jewish culture, and less adapted in fact resistant to Greco-Roman culture. They were the Essenes, who thought that the rest of Israel was so contaminated that they withdrew and formed their own community at the Dead Sea; they preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls, but they were so far away from the main action that we don't even encounter them in the pages of the New Testament. Then there were the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers who thought that the rest of Israel was contaminated too, so they advocated keeping the kosher laws, the Sabbath, circumcision, and certain key Jewish laws. They were like the African Americans who wanted to impose a brown bag test – if your skin was lighter than a brown bag, you weren't black enough. If you didn't observe enough of the Jewish law, you weren't Jewish enough. Then there were the militant groups who tried to take over the Galilee area or liberate Jerusalem from the Romans. Everyone wanted to kick out the Romans and rule over them. In the lower right quadrant, you have people who were less identified with Jewish culture. They were the Sadducees and the tax collectors. The Sadducees were a group of wealthy landowners who made deals with the Romans. They sold out by compromising their theology; they didn't believe in resurrection because that was jihad doctrine at the time. If you fight for God and Jewish law, you would be resurrected. The Sadducees didn't want to fight, so they removed the fighting doctrine. They adapted to Greco-Roman culture. They sold out theologically. The tax collectors were Jews who decided to work for the Roman government by collecting the taxes from their fellow Jews. They sold out economically and were seen as people who worked for 'the man.' They were pimping their own people for the enemy. In the lower left quadrant, you had people who did not identify with either Jewish culture or Greco-Roman culture. They were rejected by both. They were the Samaritans, the biracial people who were the descendants of the Assyrians and Jews when Assyria conquered the northern part of Israel. The other Jews didn't like them, and vice versa. The 'sinners' and prostitutes were Jews who discarded the Jewish law, so mainstream Jews avoided them. In the upper right quadrant, you had people who the bicultural people, the priests. Priests managed the Temple so that the Jewish people could go there on the holy days to worship. But they also had to work with the Roman officials. So they worked both sides.



So what did Jesus do? Jesus replaced the Temple. He said, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days' (Jn.2:19). He was referring to his own body. He was the new dwelling place of God. God always wanted to live within human beings, not buildings. And he began that with Jesus. That meant the priests in Jerusalem were out of a job.



So Jesus defined what it meant to be highly identified with God first *and* highly adaptable to other cultures second. Of course, he called Jews to himself, even ones opposed to him. He kept having lunch with people who were trying to trap him. Then he went to the Samaritans. He healed the servant of a Roman centurion. He went to an ancient graveyard and liberated a Gentile man terrorized by the supernatural. He healed the sick daughter of a Canaanite family. Jesus embodied God's personal response to all these different people and cultures. He doesn't just sit there in heaven, or in the Jerusalem Temple, and say, 'Everyone come to me.' God comes looking for us in the person of Jesus. He takes a human body to do that, so he could communicate in human words, language, and gestures. That is what God did in the human person of Jesus. Jesus defined what it meant to be truly Jewish and truly Christian and truly human. To be truly Jewish and truly Christian and truly human is to be for the whole world in the love of God.



Let me tell you why Protestants like me and most of you have failed to understand this about Jesus. Since Luther and Calvin, we have placed everyone on merely one axis that ranges from 'pride' to 'humility.' While there was some truth to that, it was an oversimplification. It made sense of people like Pharisees, lawyers, and scribes as the 'proud' Jewish people, and 'a few tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes' as the humble Jewish people. But it didn't make full sense of the Essenes, militants, other tax collectors, and especially the Samaritans and Gentiles. In Luke 4, Jesus says he's going to share God's grace with the Gentiles. The reaction of the people in the synagogue is not, 'Will they be saved by faith or works?' No! Instead, they just get mad at Jesus and try to kill him, because they don't like *Gentiles*. The issue is not *how* people will be saved; it's *who* can be saved. They were, in a sense, racist, because they thought of being Jewish as a race or an ethnicity. But Jesus disagreed. For Jesus, being Jewish meant being for the whole world. Well if you don't think of ethnocentrism and racism and cultural imperialism as sins, chances are you'd commit those sins. So for one thing, the Magisterial Protestants didn't do real mission work! The Protestants that followed Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Zurich, Calvin in Geneva, Vasa in Sweden, and so on, did not leave Western Europe *for 250 years!* And when the famous missionary William Carey first said, 'Let's go to India and China,' one of his elders at his church said, 'When God chooses to save the heathen, He'll do it without you and me!' Then, when Protestants finally did go out into the world, did they respect other people's cultures? No, they trashed them. That is why a lot of Protestant expansion collaborated with racism, nationalism, economic injustice, and cultural imperialism. Look at the U.S.: settled by Protestants, led to racial genocide of Native Americans and slavery for blacks. Look at South Africa: settled by Protestants, led to Apartheid. Look at Southeast Asia: The Protestants merchants who went there didn't even try to share Jesus. They just cared about profit for the Dutch East India Company. Catholics also made grave mistakes in Latin America, but on the whole they did better than Protestants for various reasons; the Jesuits especially were bicultural; they were missional and culturally sensitive. Protestants weren't. This is precisely the opposite of what we find Jesus doing with Zaccheus in Luke 19. Jesus turned Zaccheus into a person who cared about his mission to the world, and he doesn't want to get in the way. That's why he sought reconciliation with others. He wanted to help alleviate the economic injustice in the system. Why did Protestants screw it up? It was their *theology*. *We are not making that mistake here!!!*

The Law of Moses Was Meant to Reveal, Not Just Regulate

So the next question is, 'Then why did God choose Israel in the first place?' They weren't chosen to be better than other people. They were chosen to know their need and everyone's need for a new humanity. That is precisely what Paul says here in Ephesians 2:14 – 16.

Illus: Let me give you a small example of what I mean. I have two children, my son John who is 10, and my daughter Zoe who is 8. All of you know that girls have a growth spurt at an earlier age than boys. Well, that's been happening. This very month, Zoe caught up to John in height and is now a little taller than him. John has a good sense of humor and doesn't really mind most of the time. But when that first happened, there was an incident. My kids were brushing their teeth together in the bathroom. Then all of a sudden, I hear Zoe say, 'John!!' John had pushed his sister into the bathtub. In my mind, I think there was some jealousy going on about height. So I took him aside and said, 'Look, you need to apologize to your sister.' He did. Then I said to him, 'John, you let your worse side get the better of you.'

Within every cell of our body is a corruption of sin that we have participated in. It is that 'worse side' of us. And it is real! Israel was the people who had the most insight into the human condition. They knew that their human love did not measure up to God's love. How? Because God called Israel to that kind of love at Mount Sinai starting at Exodus 19. It was encoded in the Law of Moses. Check out how it compares to a law code from around the same time, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi:

Hammurabi vs. Moses

- *Code of Hammurabi:* ¹⁹⁷ If a man has broken another man's limb, his own shall be broken. ¹⁹⁸ If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of a *poor man*, he shall pay one maneh of silver. ¹⁹⁹ If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of *the servant* of another man, he shall pay one-half of a mina. ²⁰⁰ If a man has made the tooth of another to fall out, one of his own teeth shall be knocked out. ²⁰¹ If the tooth be that of a *poor man*, he shall pay one-third of a maneh of silver.
- *Leviticus 24* ¹⁷ If a man takes the life of *any human being*, he shall surely be put to death. ¹⁸ The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life. ¹⁹ If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: ²⁰ fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. ²¹ Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. ²² There shall be *one standard* for you; it shall be *for the stranger as well as the native*, for I am the LORD your God.

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What does this mean about the biblical God? God loves every single person equally. God loves every single person, and He was calling people to love every single person. He doesn't favor one group over another. In the Code of Hammurabi, and in many other social codes up to today, your wealth determines your worth. People who were poor, enslaved, or foreign often did not count as full human beings. Sadly, today, they still do not. But in the Law of Moses, it was the reverse; a person's worth determined their relatedness to others and their minimum level of wealth. This 'one standard...for the stranger as well as the native,' regardless of whether the victim was poor or rich, is startling, especially given Israel's historical context. Who else believed this? In the U.S. Constitution, black slaves were treated as only 3/5 of a person, and then again, under Jim Crow segregation in the American South and other forms of racism in the North, still something less than a person. Furthermore, look at how we have only had citizens' rights and not human rights. At one point in the U.S., 'citizen' was defined as being a white, landowning male; and everyone else who wasn't that had to fight to be included as a 'citizen.' This is why we don't really know what our responsibility is to illegal immigrants, children of illegal immigrants like in the Dream Act, people in other countries, and the unborn and future generations. They aren't citizens of our country, so we don't really feel a responsibility to them. But here in the Law of Moses, God puts a value on human life, including citizens and foreigners. This principle was revolutionary, not just for the ancient world, but even ours today. Who would have said this? This is evidence that the real author of this material was not just human. I believe it was God. The Law of Moses was not a complete reflection of God's character, only a partial reflection of God's original ideal for all relationships starting from creation. One of the clearest points in the Law of Moses is that God values each and every human being, because God made humanity in His image.

Maybe you and I would like to believe that every person is equal and has intrinsic worth even if there were no God who loves every person, but if there were no such God, why would each and every human being be valuable? If you went to China and said, 'You're committing human rights violations and you need to stop,' they might say, 'Do human rights really exist? Where do they come from? It is not self-evident. Maybe that's just your culture. But it's not ours. And in the name of multiculturalism you have to accept that.' And then what do you say? Professor John Gray at the London School of Economics says, 'Secular humanism is a Christian heresy. It is a hollowed out version of Christianity.' It's an attempt to preserve the dignity, worth, and value of every single person, without Jesus. But as Friedrich Nietzsche said, 'When you cut the root, you lose the fruit.' When you cut off belief in Jesus, you lose the fruit, which is the worth and value of every single person. If any of you don't believe me, then join a conversation I'm having with an atheist young man, and you try to persuade him. He recently said, 'I think Bill Gates is worth more than a homeless person. He's accomplished more and had more impact, so he's worth more.' I

said, 'I don't agree, but I'm curious why you think that.' He said, 'Because on our own, we don't really matter. We have to *do* something to matter.' Your wealth determines your worth. It's another form of the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi! How would you argue with that?

This God disagrees with that, because He holds in His heart love for every single human being before their 'doing' anything. He loved you before you 'did' anything. He upholds our rights in His right hand and He defends our very being in His commands. You see, so often when we read the Old Testament and see that God seems to get angry quite often, we ask, 'Is He a meanie?' We get skeptical about God's character. But when one of my two kids hits the other one, I get mad. Why? Because I love them both. That's what's happening in the Old Testament. In other stories, like the Gilgamesh Epic or the Iranian Avestas or Homer's Iliad, the gods mostly care about getting their prestige. They don't really love us, and they don't really care about whether people oppress one another. In the Bible, the opposite of God's love is not anger; it's apathy. The Jews wound up oppressing the alien, the poor, widows and orphans, and yes, God got mad. If He were apathetic, that would be even more disturbing. When your parents are the victims of racism, don't you think God should care? Or when you're ignored, don't you think God should care? Well, He does! He is passionate about you. Yes, He also cares for those who sin, so He wants their growth too. He is not distant, or distracted with something else. That is why He intervenes by attacking the root problem of evil in each person, through Jesus. Jesus does something to our human nature. He grabs hold of it, transforms it, and heals it.

We tend to think that all our problems can be solved *externally*. If there's racism, we think we can *educate* it out of people, or *legislate* it out of people. If there's ethnocentrism, we think we can *educate* it out of people, or *legislate* it out of people. But why do racism and all that seem to keep going? The former President of the American Sociological Association Joe Feagin said in 2000 and again in 2010 that the United States can be characterized as a 'total racist society.' Why is it so persistent? That's the question Jesus raises right to our face. I don't think racism per se is innate, but I do think we just have a problem in us that works out in our relationships, like Cain had a problem with Abel. It seems like we can love only a few people in our better moments, while more often than not, the way we treat other people is marked by apathy, competitiveness, and sometimes hostility. Our hearts have a problem.

This is why we need to learn from Israel's experience through the Old Testament period. Israel had really good laws, good ways of educating their people, and good circumstances. But they still failed. So the human biblical writers concluded that it wasn't something external to them. It was *internal*. It's a corruption we brought about in our own human nature. God gave Israel the Law of Moses to reveal to the Jews their own hearts and ultimately how He would heal and transform their hearts personally (e.g. Dt.30:6). But if breaking this Law was a big problem for the Jews, what did that mean for Gentiles, or non-Jews? How did Jews see Gentiles? They would say, 'You immoral pagans; you suck' (Isa.65:1 – 5). Technically, there's some truth to that, but Israel themselves would break God's Law, too, because they had the same humanity, and the same corruption. Gentiles would look at the Jews and say, 'You are hypocritical snobs. You're the problem; you think you're better than us???' That was also technically true, but they did not learn from what Israel was learning about the human heart.

Jesus Removes the Enmity

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- thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the *enmity*.

God's Law started an 'enmity' between Jews and non-Jews (Ephesians 2:15, 16). When you encounter any standard, our selfishness turns it into a weapon to use against others, and a platform for us to stand on. That's how we use morality, and it was how Jews and Gentiles received the Law of Moses. The Law pointed in a direction, and then

pointed to the one who would help us go in that direction, so that we would not do it on our own strength. But Israel turned the Law into a platform and a weapon, and the Gentiles retaliated by turning it into a weapon against them. It's why Christian faith is not simply a morality, but a living relationship with Jesus who transforms us.

God has always been building a certain type of community and people *opposed* it. There is a part of us that *opposes God* because God maintains in His heart a love for another person, especially the person that we don't naturally like. That causes tension for us, and even hostility, because our love falls so far short of God's love. So when Jesus says, 'Love your enemy' (Mt.5:38 – 48), he doesn't just give the command, *he gives us the power to carry it out so we are being continually transformed to being more and more like Jesus*. There is a physical source of that power, Jesus himself, and we access his power through a spiritual connection by his Spirit. How?

Jesus Defeats Our Human Nature

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- ¹⁴ For he is our peace, who has made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall ¹⁵ by abolishing **in his flesh** the enmity,
 - the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that **in himself** he might make the two into one NEW HUMANITY
- thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both **in one body** to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Jesus conquered the internal problem we have. Paul in Ephesians says Jesus 'in his flesh' abolished the enmity (v.14), so that 'in himself he might make...one new humanity' (v.15), and reconcile people 'in one body to God' (v.16). There is something about Jesus' physical body here that is really important. Jesus had taken on *flesh* in v.14 and abolished the enmity in his own flesh. In Greek, that term is *sarki*. 'Flesh' in the New Testament is a way of speaking about human nature in its corrupted form. Paul said elsewhere, 'I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my *flesh*' (Rom.7:18). So for Jesus to come in human flesh means that he was correcting human nature. He was bending it back to what it was supposed to be.

Illus: What's it like to have an internal problem, that you can't fix on your own? What if you had a life threatening sickness, and needed a transplant? Earlier this year, I was asked to get a blood test to be a bone marrow donor. There was an older Asian American woman in California who had leukemia and needed bone marrow. I know that people with leukemia lose resistance to other diseases because they don't have enough white blood cells. They bruise or bleed a lot because they don't have enough red blood cells. So they need new bone marrow because bone marrow produces new blood cells. Since it's pretty hard to find a bone marrow match, I said I'd go in for a blood test. But I have to say – I was scared! My friend Frank was a bone marrow donor years ago, and I remember him after the procedure. We went to watch a movie, and he was walking really...slow... He was *in pain*. He sat down really...slowly... The doctor had given him a local anesthetic at his tailbone. But then he took out this huge, thick needle. The needle was thick because it needed to break into his tailbone and get the marrow inside. OUCH!! That needle breaks into your BONE!! Afterwards, my friend Frank had a really sore butt. Now it turns out that I wasn't a match for her. I have to admit I was glad I wasn't a match.

But Jesus was *our match*. We have a life threatening sickness. The symptoms are obvious. We need something from outside ourselves put inside ourselves to replace what's gone wrong. But if we're all infected with the same thing, then where are we going to find a cure? I can't help you, and you can't help me. I have the same problem you have. That is why this loving God had to become one of us in Jesus, take on our human nature, and contract our disease. Imagine a doctor who does not just give you medicine, he gives you himself. What if the doctor takes our disease into himself, fights it, dies in order to kill it, and then is resurrected from the dead with a cleansed, healed, and transformed human nature? And then, what if he gives us himself – what is inside himself – as the antidote?

How do we see that with Jesus? Start in his hometown. Jesus grew up in a 'racially' charged neighborhood, although it wasn't 'race' per se as we understand it today. Nazareth was rough. The Roman Empire had put a garrison of soldiers in Nazareth, and the Jews hated it. You could imagine how that went down with the Jews there. 'Those oppressors! They occupy our country, exploit us, and tax us. They get fat as we go hungry.' The Romans probably hated the Jews, too. 'Why do I have to be here with these lousy people? They think they're so superior even though we crushed them.' Jesus grew up in that environment. But he did not give in to his culture's suspicion, hatred, and violence. Even though everyone around him was giving into it, he resisted. And when he announced one day in the Nazareth synagogue that he was going to show God's love to the Romans too, they tried to kill him. They tried to throw him off a cliff nearby. But he stared them down and walked right through the crowd. And then, all the way up to his dying breath on the cross, he loved his enemies. When the Roman soldiers were driving nails, much thicker than a bone marrow extraction needle, into his hands and feet, he prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

I cannot imagine how he did this. I get annoyed with my neighbors because I don't like how they shovel their snow!! You know, like when they leave their sidewalks icy. Or when they only shovel their car out, and dump snow into a place that could be another parking space. I'm from California, and I feel like Boston's culture lacks of hospitality; so I ask, 'Where do you expect visitors to park?' And I'm an engineer by training, so I'm always interested in the most efficient solution. So I get annoyed with how my neighbors shovel their snow. But Jesus never seemed to be annoyed. Unlike us, Jesus was victorious over every selfish impulse. He fought it, and gave himself at every moment to the love of God the Father. And then, through his death on the cross, Jesus killed the disease that was in himself. He had the anger and wrath of a surgeon, who takes his surgical scalpel to cut out the cancer he hates in the people he loves. Jesus cut into his own human nature to destroy that disease. And then second, to personally give you a purified, healed, and transformed human nature in his bodily resurrection, and work out his antidote in you. God is a doctor, but He doesn't just give us medicine. He gives us Himself. He took on our sick condition personally in a human body. He wrestled down the disease itself. He poured out all of his hatred against all of the corruption in every cell in his body. He went to hang his flesh on a tree, which was an old Jewish curse, symbolizing the curse of God. He perfected the antibodies in his own physical body, Jesus' body. So Jesus now has a healed human nature, a cleansed human nature, a God-soaked human nature. He is, as Ephesians 2:15 says, a 'new humanity.' And we are meant to become a new kind of human being.

This is why, when I am calling for your partnership and your decision, I'm calling you to participate in an objective reality. I'm not asking you to join me in wishing or dreaming. There is an objective reality – Jesus. He is God's new humanity for all humanity. It has been done by Jesus. And that means that it is objectively true that there is a God who is 100% good, who is defeating evil, even the evil in us. That God objectively exists. He is not a Freudian father figure, a Santa Claus in the sky, a whimsical Zeus, or a passive god who sits there with his eyes closed and arms folded who just cares about his own personal peace. And this God is so good that He has provided for our own human response, by putting the Spirit of Jesus into us, a new bone marrow in us, to participate in the humanity of Jesus, which is the perfect human response to all these problems, and the perfect loving response to a loving God. When we sing in worship, we do not sing alone; for we sing in Jesus as Jesus adores his Father. When we serve the world, we do not serve alone; for we serve in Jesus as Jesus loves the world. When we call the world to justice and healing and transformation in Jesus, we do not call alone; for we speak the call of Jesus to this world.

We don't do this on our own strength, but we enter into a deep relationship with Jesus where we talk with him, we let him shape our hearts, we follow his leading, and we try to remain as open to him as we can. Jesus really does lead us. There was a chemical engineer from MIT who got interested in missions. He was interested in Asia, Bangladesh because of all the floods. He believed they needed durable housing that could resist monsoon rains. The floods would wipe out the housing. It had to be affordable, durable housing. He asked what he could do as a chemical engineer. What if he could use local products to contribute to the housing. They had a lot of rice. He started experimenting with rice on his own time. He began to learn about the chemical properties of rice. In the end, what he came up with was a certain powder that was inexpensive to manufacture in the U.S. When you added it to rice, it turned into cement that was completely impermeable to water. It's this kind of creativity and imagination and love. It's something small that God uses. We do it out of a real relationship with Jesus, out of depending on him, talking with him, and letting him live out his life through us. The love comes from Jesus but the expression comes from us.

Response: Now the response is symbolized by an action. I don't have a big budget, but I was able to buy glow sticks. As you know, breaking one of these glow sticks makes light shine. I'd like you to think of this glow stick as Jesus' physical body, broken for you. But after it is broken, Jesus rises from the dead as a healed, God-soaked, God-

drenched human being, and light shines. I'd like you to consider making one of the following two decisions, depending on who you are.

1. The first decision that I'd like you to consider is for those of you who are thinking of making your first commitment to Jesus. For those of you who are not Christians, again, I would love your partnership at any level. But as long as you try to do this without Jesus, then I am afraid that you are oversimplifying the problem. I am afraid that you are misdiagnosing the disease by locating the sickness somewhere else. And therefore I am afraid that you are prescribing superficial solutions, like a bandaid for leukemia. I'm also concerned that you have no intellectual foundation for human value. So I would prefer that you give your life to Jesus to see the situation not subjectively as if it were just your culture's passing fad, but objectively, as if it were rooted in an objective Jesus, because it is. If you are making a commitment to Jesus, by giving your life to him and receiving him, then I'd like you to break the glow stick and hold it in your hands before you as a reminder to yourself of who he is and what he has done.
2. For those of you who are Christians and would like to make a commitment of taking a next step in your journey with Jesus with regards to articulating your own culture, or learning another's culture, or taking a practical step of social justice, or exploring the issue of race, this is your chance to symbolize your commitment to do that. You don't have to take on all the issues, or take on the whole world. Just one meaningful step. This is a decision between you and Jesus. Perhaps you can talk about it later with others. But I'd encourage you to just take one step. If you are making that commitment with Jesus now, then I'd like you to break the glow stick and hold it in your hands before you as a reminder to yourself of who he is and what he has done.

This is the body of Christ, broken for you...