

The Third Way explained

Ephesians 2:11-22

How can this study help me?

There is a need for us to appreciate the image of a Third Way again. Today there is competition between two ways which we see all the time in the media. One way is religious fanaticism, which uses violence to achieve its goals. Another way is worship of materialism and the pursuit of health, prosperity, pleasure and self-fulfilment. Real Christianity is a third way today. It renounces violence and materialism and talks of faith, hope and peace.

What is going on in this section

There was a time when Australia was threatened by an influx of “boat people”, illegal immigrants who arrived in boats. Their arrival brought out some expressions of racism, the hostility shown to people of another race.

There’s nothing new under the sun. In this section of Ephesians, Paul gives the antidote to the racism he had grown up with. Being a Jew, one who was “near” (2:17) to God, he had thought of his status as superior. But now he realised that Jesus’ death and resurrection did away with all claims to superiority. God intended there to be a Third Way, made up the “near” and Gentiles, who had been “far away” (2:17) from God. We today are descendants of the Third Way.

“The far aways” verses 11-13

The Jews called the Gentiles “uncircumcised” (11) as a racial slur. Paul recognises the privileges of Jewish descent, but establishes that now it’s all a matter of history.

- What are five things that “Gentiles” could never claim? (2 12) It might help you to consult Rom 9:3-5 for an even more comprehensive list of privileges.
- Why in the big scheme of things doesn’t this matter? (verse 13)
- When Paul says “the blood of Christ” (13) was the great leveller what is he thinking of? (cf., 1:7) Why doesn’t he choose some sort of more palatable image?

Red, not white, the colour of peace verse 14-18

Verses 14-18 say that there are now no longer two groups, the Jews and Gentiles, but one. The colour of peace is NOT white, but red, the colour associated with the death of Jesus.

- How many times can you count the word “peace” in these verses? Given the racial tension, is it “peace” with God or “peace” between Jew and Gentile? How does Col. 1:20 help to explain the idea of peace?
- What did the Jews think saved them? (15; cf., Rom 2:17-20)
- How does verse 18 express a triune view of God without making a dogmatic statement?

What about us here and now?

The New Temple (verses 19-22)

- How many allusions can you find to a building in this paragraph?

One of the seven wonders of the ancient world was the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus. Remember it was a silversmith who made shrines of Artemis that started a riot in an attempt to get rid of Paul (Acts 19:23ff).

- Is there something ironic in Paul’s vision of Jew and Gentile as a new temple? What is the temple built upon? Who makes up the building blocks? Who are the priests? What is the sacrifice?
- Paul will mention “the apostles and prophets” again (4:11). How do you understand their foundational role? Can anyone replace their role? How do you distinguish between the foundational role and the other gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12:27-30?
- How is this paragraph unconsciously Trinitarian again?

What do I need to do?

- Why would it make for better relationships and a higher profile if churches all shared the same background and experiences?
- Why does Jesus persist in bringing people together in churches who are very different?
- Who have you been neglecting or depreciating and what must you do?