

A Church Without Distinction Of Race Or Intellect

by Zac Poonen

This sermon delves into the concept of 'mystery' in the New Covenant, emphasizing that true understanding comes through revelation from God, not just intellectual knowledge. It explores how Jesus broke down barriers between Jews and Gentiles, symbolizing unity and peace in the body of Christ. The message challenges believers to eliminate prejudices, cultural divides, and pride, emphasizing the need to embrace unity in diversity as a vital aspect of living out the New Covenant.

Scripture: Ephesians 3:3, Ephesians 2:14, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:10, James 2:5, Romans 6:6, John 13:34, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:28

Topics: "Unity in Diversity", "Divine Revelation"

Description

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Transcript

So we want to continue our study on the New Covenant, not in a theoretical academic way as points or powerpoint presentations, seeing different things, because we can know so much, you know, theoretically and yet not know it in practice. So in addition to all the areas where we saw distinction between the Old and the New Covenant, I want to turn today to Ephesians in chapter 2. There's a word that comes very often in the New Covenant, New Testament, called mystery. Mystery is something which you never find in the Old Testament.

There are no mysteries in the Old Testament. A mystery is something you cannot understand if God does not give you revelation. What you think you understand is only intellectual.

It doesn't change your life. So here we read about something that Jesus did. I want to first read Ephesians 3, where Paul says in verse 2, if you've heard of the stewardship of God's grace which is given to me for you by revelation, it was made known to me the mystery.

A mystery can be known only by revelation. You can read it and use your intellect and explain it and you haven't understood it. There are multitudes of born-again Christians who have not understood some of the mysteries mentioned in the New Testament.

They can explain it intellectually, but it's not true in their life. And what is this mystery? And by referring to this which you read, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men. So this is something which is not made known until the day of Pentecost, but has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, which is on the day of Pentecost.

Till then it was not known. And then he explains this mystery. What is it? That the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel of which I was made a minister.

And you listen to that and say, hey, what's the great mystery in that? That the Jews and Gentiles ought to be together in one church? I've known that for years. Really? Okay, let's check up. One of the things that Jesus did on the cross, He did a number of things on the cross.

He died for our sins. Our old man was crucified with Him, Romans 6. Satan was defeated on the cross, Colossians 2 and Hebrews 2. And here's another thing that happened on the cross. That's in Ephesians chapter 2. It says in verse 13, in Christ Jesus you were brought near who were far away, but now, verse 14, He Himself is our peace, who had, this is the mystery, who has made both these groups, these groups are Jews and Gentiles, into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.

The Jews and the Gentiles were the greatest opposites in the world. You think of two completely opposite types of human beings. There's nothing greater than Jews and Gentiles.

We have in India a caste system which is initiated by heathen religions, where people are in different levels. And those in the highest caste in those heathen religions, if the shadow of a lower caste person comes by when they walk by, the guy's got to go and have a shower. That's how they feel.

I've been defiled because this guy's shadow came on me. But the Jews and Gentiles were even more than that. Jews would get up and be thankful every day that they were not Gentiles.

It was a tremendous pride that we belong to the race of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God has chosen to be his people and look down on everybody else. But Jesus brought them all together and it says here there was a barrier of a dividing wall which was broken down by Christ on the cross.

This is another thing that happened on the cross. And not only that, this barrier came because in our flesh there is an enmity. There was an enmity which is in the flesh which made the Jews hate the Gentiles and probably Gentiles hate the Jews.

And you find even today a lot of people who hate the Jews and a lot of Jews who hate others. And Jesus made the two into one new man establishing peace. This is not old covenant, this is new covenant.

And he reconciled them both in one body to God through the cross. And on the cross he destroyed or put to death that enmity. So it says here in verse 15 there's an enmity in our flesh against someone who's completely different from us.

It doesn't have to be another race. Do you know why all husband-wife conflicts come from? It's not because the wife is another race. It's because there's an enmity in the flesh of the husband and an enmity in the flesh of the wife which brings the conflict.

And they build up a dividing wall, even husband and wife from the same race, same language, same everything. Otherwise there'd be no conflict. And the only way the solution to that is what it says in Galatians 2. And verse 20, I've been crucified with Christ.

It's no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me. And here it says that in Galatians chapter 2, I live by the faith of the Son of God who gave himself for me. And in verse 18, I want you to see this, Galatians 2.18, if I rebuild what was once destroyed by Christ, and which I also accepted, I'm a transgressor.

So how do we rebuild this? In Christ there is no difference. Turn with me to Colossians in chapter 3. It says that we have been renewed, verse 10, Colossians 3.10, put on the new self, which is renewed in the true knowledge of the image of the one who created him, a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is everything and in everything. The old covenant group was the Jewish people, they were all of one race and they found their unity not in God, but in the fact that we were all one.

We're all born from the same race of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so we are one. But in the new covenant, all that is destroyed. The dividing wall has been broken down, the enmity in the flesh has been crucified, so this Gentile and Jew have to become one without one looking down on the other.

The circumcised, uncircumcised, they don't look down on each other, and the barbarian, the barbarian is the uncouth, uncivilized, uneducated man who comes and joins this church where everybody is a cultured, educated Greek. Can you imagine how it is? A church full of Greeks, cultured, educated, smart, and one barbarian comes and joins that. That will be the salvation of that church if they are willing to accept it, but most churches will not accept it.

Most Greeks, Gentiles, Greeks will not accept this barbarian because he's so uncouth, he's so different from me. Let's make a separate church for them. And then there's a Scythian.

The Scythians, I don't know whether you know that, they are the ones whom the barbarians consider barbarians. This is really low. Imagine a Scythian joining a church of Greeks.

Now, we can look at all this and say, well, thank God we are not like that. You've got to be careful before you say that. You know, prejudice against other races is so deeply entrenched in us that even where people theoretically accept this, it doesn't work out in practice.

Now, if you go to a locality in the world where everybody is the same language and the same race, naturally, in a church there, everybody will be on the same race and the same language because everybody in that town or that area is of the same language and the same race. But when you go to a town or a city where there are people of many races living there, and you go to a church in that city, and you find everybody's of the same race, what does that prove? Exactly what I'm saying here. The enmity has not been destroyed.

The middle wall of partition has not been broken down. And you can go to numerous churches here in the United States where most cities, there are multiple races of people living there, and you'll find people of one community gathering there. They could be all Indians, and remember, non-Indians look at Indians and

say they're all Indians, but they're not all Indians.

There are Telugu Indians, there are Tamil Indians, there are Malayali Indians. They're different, completely different, sometimes different races. So you'll find in America a church of Malayali Indians only.

There's not a single other person in that church. You go to another church, it's only Tamil Indians, only another church, only Telugu Indians. You go to another church, only Germans.

Another church, only Russians. Another church, only Romanians. This is all old covenant, and people prefer that.

We had a problem in a CFC church a little while ago where there were some people left, and you go and look at the people who left. They're all of one race. Hearing of the new covenant for so many years, they go and build another old covenant church.

Do you recognize that one race is all covenant? All Jews. It's comfortable to be with people of your own race. Why did God in his great wisdom put all these multiple people together? I'll tell you why.

Because that's the only place we can experience the cross in our life in areas which are untouched by other things. I can say I died to myself in relation to sin. Die to yourself in relation to race, and you'll find it's quite another thing altogether.

And God is determined to destroy everything that is not of Christ which you've inherited from Adam. When God made Adam, it was one man, and every race on earth has come from that. But through the years, man has developed pride in their own race and language, and if that is not being destroyed, you're still in the old covenant.

If you love to be only with people of your own community, I want to tell you in Jesus' name, you are an old covenant person, even if you sit in a new covenant church. But you prefer to be only with people of your own community, or people of your own educational level. That's another thing.

It says you're cultured and uncultured. There are people who, I've seen this in CFC churches, the educated people, you see them after the church service, they'll always talk to the educated people. They will not talk to those who are not so educated as them.

And I've seen this in Bangalore. They end up as the worst people in our church, and they never develop. They don't see the arrogance and pride in them.

Very good young people who don't see the arrogance and pride in them because they only want to mingle with people of their own level in society. Do you know that the Bible says in James chapter 2 that God has chosen the poor of the world, verse 5, rich in faith. Would you like to mingle with people who are rich in faith, or would you always like to mingle with people who are poor in faith? This is God's Word.

See, I thank God that from the beginning of our work in India, God took us to the cities where we have highly educated PhDs and computer scientists, and down to the poorest villages where people cannot read or write. We have believers in CFC churches in India who cannot read or write. They've got to get their little daughters who are studying in school to read the Bible to them.

Or if they're a little well off, they can listen to audio Bible on a phone. Otherwise, uneducated, illiterate, poor, extremely poor, living in one-room houses and mingling with others who live in five-room houses.

We don't, we're not communists where we say we distribute income equally and make everybody equal.

It's like cutting off all fingers and say God made a mistake making all these fingers different sizes. Let's say this is communism. We're not communists.

We say we have all got our own different sizes of houses and different incomes. We don't make everybody's income equal, but we love one another. That's what Jesus said, all men will know you're my disciples when you love one another, not when you make everybody's income equal and everybody's houses the same size, but we learn to love one another.

And yet there's so much of this. You know, I come from a part of India. I can speak about it because I come from there.

It's called Kerala. Christianity first came to Kerala in AD 52 when Thomas came, the Apostle Thomas. We've had Christianity there for nearly 2,000 years and in all the 22 or more states of India, the biggest Pharisees are in my state.

I mean all over. They are the biggest Pharisees in the whole country. They are proud of their inheritance, of their heritage.

They boast, I come from such and such a family, from such and such a tribe of, you know, so many people who've distinguished people, etc. Sometimes people tell me that and they ask me what tribe I come from and I say I came from the family that got kicked out of Eden many years ago, but Jesus had mercy on me and saved me. That's all I can say.

Do you believe that? Do you believe you come from the family that is kicked out of Eden? Or do you feel you've got something else, a little education perhaps, a little color on your skin which makes you superior, a little intelligence, a little something that makes you a little your family tribe or something, some garbage which still has not been eliminated. Ask yourself whether you really understood the new covenant. This is why I want to say to you, you're missing something in the Christian life.

You cannot enter into God's presence if you keep this bit of the flesh still in you and that's why I believe there are many, many Christians who understand so many theories. They do not enter into the most holy place. In the most holy place dwells God and one mark of dwelling in the presence of God is fullness of joy.

If you don't have fullness of joy, you are not in God's presence. I've said that to myself many times. Anytime I find myself without fullness of joy, I say, Lord, what did I miss out now? I'm not in your presence.

In your presence there's fullness of joy and I'm not there. I can understand all the theories and sometimes the reason could be a certain prejudice against people who are of another type or a little different from me, whose temperament is different. I say this because I've seen this with young people.

For example, in India and in almost third world countries, they look up to Western, the white races. It's a fact in India, even Christians, they feel that the Western, because the Western missionaries came to all these countries when they were all unconverted, they look up to Western white Christians as superior, even today. And that's how so many people never grow spiritually.

They have to eliminate from my mind that any particular race is superior. No, no race is superior. We all came from Adam.

And if I recognize that, if I don't recognize that, I'll be an old covenant Christian all my life. There is no distinction. Now let me give one disclaimer here, a clarification.

This does not mean that you should marry anybody, because in marriage you've got to look at spirit, soul and body. I don't believe that we should just say, okay, we all came from Adam, so we can marry anyone. Someone may not be suited for you.

For example, someone who's 50 years older than you. It may not be wise to marry such a person. So you're considering age, right? But age is not a spiritual thing.

Why do you consider it? Because you wouldn't be suitable. So there are things like that we have to consider. For example, if you don't speak the same language, well, the only advantage of such a marriage is you'll never fight.

But otherwise, you'll never have any fellowship either. Why do you consider language? That's not a spiritual thing. Unconsciously, we are considering certain factors like age, language, and I could mention other things.

We think we are not considering anything. We are, unconsciously. Height.

I've never seen a man who's married a woman who is one foot, one and a half feet taller than him. Why not? Height has got nothing to do with spirituality. If the man is taller, you say okay, but if the woman is a foot and a half taller, you say no.

We are considering factors other than spiritual factors, whether you like it or not. We don't think culture, language are unimportant in marriage, but when it comes to the church, there is no difference. We are one in Christ.

It's very important for us to remember this. There is no Jew, no Gentile, no educated, uneducated, and I say this, the tremendous loss that has come to many, many believers I have seen in our churches, among so many other things, but they've been proud of their intellect. They mingle only with people at a certain level.

I want to encourage you, clever people, educated people sitting here, mingle with those in the church who are much poorer than you, who are less educated, and who are from a much lower culture. Mingle with them and learn something. I have sat in homes where I sit on the ground with poor people in India, and I have learned so much from them.

I have become a richer man, spiritually, because I've gone for that. And I would tell you from my own experience, destroy this artificial thing that Jesus destroyed, this middle wall of partition, this enmity in my flesh, and you will enter into the new covenant. It's not the only thing, but it's a very important thing.

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