

## The Goal is Love

(Part 3)

Passages: 1 Timothy 2:1-15  
Matthew 7:1-5

I had to go into the city on Saturday morning so I walked to the station to catch a train. As I arrived on the platform, I met a Chinese woman who had only been in Australia a couple of months. She wanted to go to the Fish Markets, so I helped her. I showed her the map, how she needed to go to Central and change to the Light Right line to Darling Harbour. She was extremely grateful, and so, when we boarded the train at Penshurst, she invited me to sit with her.

We had a lovely conversation as she told me about her work in a factory in Taren Point and I told her about my job as pastor of this church. I told her how great this church is and how God is moving us towards becoming a truly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic church. I even told her how we believed that it was God's intention is to see the whole world become united under the Lordship of Jesus Christ—to reconcile all things and all people to Himself in perfect unity.

Her response was interesting. She said, *“This can never happen! Human beings will never be reconciled together. There are too many differences between us. We have to accept the fact that the world will always be divided...always in conflict.”*

Now, it is true that there are many things that separate the people of this world. And yet, the Bible is quick to point out that Jesus Christ came into the world to bring this divided world back together again...into His family. Indeed, it has always been God's intention that, through the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus' death and resurrection and through the changing of our hearts by God's Spirit, God would one day gather all the nations of the world around His throne in worship ... one day! In the meantime, according to the Bible, the church is meant to be the practical expression, in the 'now', of God's glorious *future* goal.

Isn't this exactly what we've been seeing in our studies in 1 Timothy? The Apostle Paul was an obvious champion of *Christian multi-culturalism*. Although he once fought against it and even killed people who tried to compromise or water-down the Jewish faith, Paul had a conversion experience on the road to Damascus which entirely changed his views. And so, as Paul evangelised and planted churches throughout the Middle East, he repeatedly insisted that *the church must be a place where there is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no male or female*. Divisions such as these were human barriers to *Christ's new humanity!*

It was particularly obvious when Paul first went to the city of Ephesus just how much he was opposed to racial segregation. That's why he stayed there for a whole year, **in order to help the local Christians sort out their cultural differences**. The *Jewish converts* to Christianity needed to learn how to live and worship with the *converted pagans* who came out of *Roman culture*. Of course, it wasn't easy! **But after one year of Paul's ministry amongst them, it seemed as if the Christians in Ephesus were finally practicing the art of Christian unity.**

And so, Paul writes a wonderful letter to them...the letter we call '**Ephesians**'... and he says things like this to them:

Eph 1:9-10 ***And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.***

Eph 2:14-18 ***For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.***

Eph 3:6 ***This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.***

Eph 4:2-6 ***Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one***

***another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.***

One year's worth of work seems to have paid off! Or, at least it did for a while.

You see, not long after Paul wrote his glowing letter to the Ephesians, it seems as if serious racial and cultural issues began to surface...issues that threatened to destroy the unity of Christ's church in Ephesus. As we saw two weeks ago, Jewish Christians were imposing the OT Law on Gentile converts. In response, two Greek men in the church named Hymaneus and Alexander were somehow stirring up opposing tensions. The church of Ephesus was rapidly disintegrating before Paul's eyes.

So what does Paul do?

**He sends in Timothy to immediately resolve the disputes between the Jewish and Gentile Christians.** (refer to chapter 1)

**He offers some helpful long-term advice:** (this is the essence of chapter 2)

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-8

***"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles. I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing."***

How do you fight racism? How do you stop the long-term spread of dissension between two ethnic groups? Paul's solution is beautiful—

Get them to pray and worship together! (verse 8) ***"I want men everywhere***

***to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.”***

Get them to focus on their common issues as Christians...the issues that concern God’s heart. (verses 1-2) ***“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”***

Have you ever wondered why we hold **Combined Services**? There are two reasons... taken from the Apostle Paul!

First, in order to overcome our racial differences, the Mandarin and English congregations need to regularly pray and worship together. In fact, this is so important to our long-term unity as a church that, starting this year, we’ve increased our Combined Services from 4 to **6 per year**. (Perhaps next year we’ll move to having them once a month?) But, believe me, we don’t make this decision because it’s the easier option—far from it! Combined Services are difficult—they’re difficult to plan, difficult to run, and difficult for everyone to stay focused.

However, as Paul says to the Timothy, inter-racial corporate worship brings the whole church together under our one head, Jesus Christ. As we lift up holy hands together, Jesus Christ, the world’s one and only mediator, binds the ethnically diverse people of God together **as one family**. ***“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.”***

The second reason why we have Combined Services is to focus our minds on our common walk of faith as fellow Christians. Despite the fact that we may look different or speak different languages, *we share a common government*. Let us, therefore, pray together for our government. Let us pray for the nations to live in peace. Let us pray together for greater reconciliation between the world’s ethnic groups. Indeed, let us pray that we may be an example, in miniature, of how different ethnic groups can live together through Christ!

But more than that, *we also share the common desire to see the world come*

*to know Christ...so let's pray together for that...that "all might be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*

And so, in these first 8 verses of chapter 2, Paul encourages Timothy to work with the church in Ephesus by setting in motion (what would have been) an extremely radical strategy for racial harmony, beginning, of course, with the **men**.

Turn, now, to verses 9-15. You see, Paul's strategy for racial harmony doesn't only involve the men. Paul knows that, behind the scenes, the women have also been stirring up trouble and dissension between the Jewish and Gentile Christians.

**Let's read verses 9-15.**

***"I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."***

In my opinion, this is probably one of the most abused texts in all of Scripture! The abuse comes by inappropriately pulling verse 11 out of its larger context, which, as we have seen, is all about *race relations*...and Paul's desire to see renewed ethnic harmony between the Jewish and Gentile Christians in the Ephesian church.

Of course, when you don't understand that context, it's very easy to get the impression that Paul is issuing a once-for-all command: "*Women have no right to teach, but they must stay silent in the church.*" But once you see the larger context, you start to understand that Paul is not issuing a once-for-all command but, rather, he's offering practical advice for a specific situation. The problem, as we have seen, is racism. Correct? So, then, how might racism have been practiced between the Gentile and Jewish women of the

Ephesian church?

Jewish women lived under a patriarchal system of headship. The man owned everything; the man was undisputed head of the family. As far as her public demeanour was concerned, whenever she was in public, she covered her head and kept her eyes to the ground. Her husband's reputation would be at stake whenever she ventured outside. And when it came to worship, her Jewish background insisted that she either sit at the back or stay at home. She was always the silent party.

But Gentile women lived in a very different world! As Roman citizens, women had their own personal rights. They were free to engage with the world in quite liberal ways, apart from their husband.

I hope you can already sense the tensions that would have arisen when Jewish and Gentile women came together at church on Sundays. The Jewish women would have been scandalised by the freedom displayed by their Gentile counterparts. The Jewish men would have felt insulted by their insubordinate and unconstrained behaviour. Tensions would have been high!

And so, for the sake of unity, Paul makes the decisive call: ***“I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent...”***

Clearly, Paul is defending ‘the weaker brother’ here. He stands on the side of those who are offended by modern liberality. He says to those who want to exercise their Roman freedoms to consider the other, weaker family members. The argument is almost identical to the one Paul will use when he writes to the Corinthians:

1Co 8:9,12 ***“Be careful...that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak...When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.”***

In the end, Paul is focused on the things that foster unity. **Sometimes unity is only found when we give up our freedoms for the sake of others.**

“So (says Paul)-- *Women, give up your jewellery. Dress modestly. Don't be so concerned with your hair and make-up. Indeed, stop talking and publicly asking questions. Consider the Jewish women who come to worship with you and don't put a stumbling block in their way.*”

One last thing: You may be saying, “But why doesn't Paul try to change the way the Jewish Christians understand things?” The answer is, he was...but he had a long-term view. Indeed, in the midst of all that Paul says here is one of the greatest and most radical things to help liberate Jewish women. In verse 11, Paul says, “*A women should learn...*” Yes, it's in quietness, but it's still learning! And this was an incredibly radical step for Jewish women to take—to learn. After all, in Jewish culture, a woman was not invited to attend the synagogue. If she did go along, she had to sit behind a screen, separated from the men. It would be like sitting in the crèche all the time, trying to listen and learn while the babies are crying and other women are chatting away. It just wasn't the place of women to learn. Just remember the scandal that Mary caused when she sat at Jesus' feet while Martha was in the kitchen serving the men! In Jewish society, it wasn't the place of women to learn.

Don't lose sight of this in today's passage because it explains why Paul refers to Eve and her sin. Why did Eve take the fruit of the tree? Because she was ignorant—she hadn't been taught! Paul tells the women not to be like Eve “*who was deceived*”. So listen—be taught—learn in quietness. “*Continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*”

The Chinese woman I chatted with on the train said that genuine racial harmony and reconciliation can never happen on this earth! But I disagree! Jesus has the power to change us. In Him, we learn how to work through our differences and to gather as one people, united in His gracious forgiveness and love.

This is happening here in our church! And as our church grows and prospers under Jesus, may we be a shining example of racial **reconciliation and harmony to our entire suburb**... a living testimony of the fact that only our Saviour Jesus Christ can unify our broken and divided world.

Let's pray.