

**1 Corinthians 2:9 – BUILDING AN INSATIABLE LOVE FOR GOD THIS YEAR!**

1. How have you loved on Jesus this week?
2. How has Jesus loved on you this week?

**LOOKING AT THE GRACE OF GOD BEYOND WHAT IT DID IN US AND FOR US TO WHAT GOD IS DOING THROUGH US AND WITH THOSE AROUND US.**

*Ephesians is one letter in two parts: The first part is about the grace of God in our lives and what it means. The second part is how it permeates our lives and further unpacks the mystery of Christ in us. Paul tells us we are God's workmanship for good works He has prepared for us. In what we're studying today, Paul shifts from what God has done for us personally to what is does for us interpersonally. Pastor pointed out the commonality of the messages of Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and others who all spoke about injustice. We can think that there is a cultural voice relating to this subject, but long before any of them, Paul had a unique message that tells us there is something broken in the sinfulness of our actions that can be mended by Jesus. That is the beauty of the gospel, that Jesus is fixing (and is not yet done fixing) all the things that sin has broken. Paul expands the grace of God beyond what it did in us and for us to what God is doing through us and with those around us.*

3. How has your relationship with Jesus changed how you deal interpersonally with other people?

**JESUS CAME TO BREAK DOWN WHAT RELIGION BUILT UP**

**[Ephesians 2:13-15]** Paul is speaking to Gentiles and informing ethnic Jews that the promises to the Jews through the covenant are now for everyone and made possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus. Paul tells us that the sacrifice of Jesus tore down the dividing wall of hostility. Going back to the Old Testament in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings Ch. 6 where God gives instructions to Solomon about the building of the first temple. God gives them very specific instructions regarding the temple. In 586 BC, the Babylonians took the Israelites captive and razed the city of Jerusalem, including the temple. When their captivity ended in 516 BC, the Israelites wanted to rebuild the temple, but this time they have help from Herod the Great. As a result, there are some additions to the temple that God never intended, including the Court of Gentiles and the Court of the Women that created walls of separation. Jesus comes to break down the walls prohibiting access to God. Our tendency is to build up, in the name of religion, things that make us comfortable and secure but were never intended by God. Those type of walls can prohibit people from getting to God.

4. What type of walls and separations can "religion" build up that keeps people from finding Jesus?

**WE CAN'T MAKE RESTRICTIONS WHERE JESUS GRANTED PERMISSION**

**[Matthew 27:50-51]** At the moment that Jesus offered up his final breath, the curtain to the sanctuary, where only one priest could approach God once a year in the temple, was torn from top to bottom. God had commanded the curtain to be part of the temple to represent the holiness of God. We were separated from an all-holy God because of sin. When Jesus died, this barrier to access to God was removed. When there are walls of division, we tend to evaluate one another by who's "in" and who's "out" but Jesus came to break down the walls that "religion" has built up. Wherever you are and however you are, Jesus' sacrifice made access to God available to you, right where you are. We the church can't make restrictions where Jesus granted permission. For a long while, many people in the church have equated following Jesus with a religious structure. When we build up things that God never intended, we end up prohibiting other people from having access to Jesus. We need to constantly ask ourselves if we're building up the walls Jesus came to crush.

5. What "requirements" has the church created in the past that could keep people from finding Jesus?
6. What traditions in the church that started out as good have evolved into a way of judging people as "in" or "out"?

**WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DIFFERENT BECAUSE OUR SIMILARITIES IN CHRIST OUTWEIGH OUR DIFFERENCES**

**[Ephesians 2:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:11]** Jesus broke down these barriers to make something new. Greek has a couple of different words for "new" and in this case "new" means a completely different kind or type than has ever been seen before. Jesus wasn't just making better versions of people, but making something entirely new. Our similarities now in Christ far outweigh our differences. Jesus created the church so the world would look at the church and get a glimpse of heaven as they see the Gentiles and Jews eating together and looking at one another as brothers. The church in America has forgotten this a little bit. We're supposed to be different in the way that we engage with one another. It doesn't mean we're perfect, but the church should look appealing to people who don't follow Jesus yet.

7. Where is the American church missing this mark?

**JESUS TURNS FOREIGNERS INTO FAMILY**

**[Ephesians 2:18-19]** Either the culture will influence the church, or the church will influence our culture. We have so many definitions of "religion" and even "Christian" in our society, but we are followers of Jesus and that's specific. Through Jesus, we look at people different. We look at friends in Christ and they are family! Paul wants us to understand that we shouldn't build up walls that Jesus broke down. This includes how we relate to each other.

8. How is culture influencing the church?
9. How is or can the church influence culture?
10. How have fellow Jesus-followers become a family to you?