

Fitly Framed Together

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

You can turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 2. Brethren, I'm ready to leave Ephesians 2, but not yet. Before we bid farewell and explore the wonders that lay ahead in chapter 3, I want to say a personal word. What I'm saying today is personal to me and to our church here. Look, I want to talk about race. I want to talk about the color of our skin. And you know, I don't know the best words to use. I've heard, well, if you're from Asia, you're offended if you're called "oriental." I've heard that blacks don't like to be called African American sometimes. Look, I hear what whites are called, whether it's gringo or guero. I don't know all the right terminology. So, let's just have a bit of thick skin among ourselves. I may not use all the exact right terms. But here's the deal, I don't want to leave Ephesians 2 without really bringing the rubber down to meet the road. This is practical in my estimation. Really practical. And sometimes, it's hoped that when you deal with a chapter like Ephesians 2 - especially the last half from about v. 11 all the way to the end, it deals with racial issues at a level that is practical to racial issues among Christians anywhere at any time. And sometimes as I'm preaching these things, I'm hoping that people are making the application. But you know what? Sometimes the application needs to be made for us. It can be helpful.

I want to tell you about the personal impact that Ephesians 2 has had on my own life. I didn't know why I had this picture in my mind of sitting at Community Baptist Church, and I can just see where I'm sitting - Pat Horner preaching up there, and he's probably preaching on Ephesians 2. Gospel. But I just have this picture in my mind of sitting there, as my mind is beginning to put together the realities of what the church should look like.

I'll just tell you right off, some of you know this. I went to a church in Michigan. The pastor - he didn't believe blacks could be saved. He believed they bore the mark of Cain. Now, I didn't know that. I wouldn't have gone there. Craig and I had little brothers in the Big Brother Little Brother program we were bringing from the inner city of Kalamazoo. And he told Craig after I came down here, "I don't know why you guys ever brought them. You know they can't be saved." Ruby and I got married. That pastor from Michigan specifically told Craig he would not send us a card because I had married a Hispanic girl. I didn't know these things about him when I was there. I would not have gone there.

I came down and I sat at Community Baptist Church, and I began to see some diversity. And there was a pastor who seemed to like that; encourage that. I remember when Charles Wilson came over from Japan. He was transferring in the military. So now we had Hispanics and whites and blacks. I don't remember if there were any Asians. Yeah, there were. The Tagawa's. They're kind of Hawaiian I guess. So, I saw this diversity. And the thing is I'm hearing Scripture.

And really, I find nothing more impactful; more prominent; more of an extensive treatment in all of the Bible than I find right here in the second half of Ephesians 2. If you train your eyes on v. 21, notice the words: "being joined together" V. 21 "In whom the whole structure being joined together." That's what the New King James and the ESV say. The New American Standard: "being fitted together." The King James Version: "fitly framed together."

That's the word that I especially want us to lay hold on today. It's one word in the Greek. "Fifty framed together." So, let's read v. 19-22, and just notice how this "fifty framed together." And then, a close; a similar word in v. 22 being built together. "So then, you..." now look. If you're just visiting with us; you're just joining in right here, you need to recognize who the "you" is. The "you" is specifically speaking to Gentiles. You Ephesian Gentiles. And that's exactly what the emphasis is. You who are Gentiles who have been saved. You non-Jews who have been converted "...are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord."

Now, notice this. He basically comes along and says almost exactly the same thing in v. 22. It's a lot of synonymous verbiage. You know what the big difference is? "You also..." that's the big difference. You see what he's doing here? "In Christ, you Gentiles also..." That's the remarkable thing to Paul. You're included! "You're also being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. You know what this last half is all about? It's a Jew-Gentile thing. That's what's happening. Look back up at v. 11. "Therefore remember that at one time..." Here it is. "...you." Now you see, I'm not making this up. What's on his mind? You Gentiles. That's specifically what he's got in mind. That's who he's speaking to whenever he says, "you" throughout this latter half of Ephesians 2. "You Gentiles in the flesh..."

Now notice this: "called the uncircumcision." They don't call themselves that. That's what the Jews call them. It's derogatory. You know different races typically invent derogatory names for people of other races. Do you ever notice that? Even in our own generation? That's common. They're called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

Brethren, we need to feel the difference here. Some of you who have stayed aloof - well, maybe that's not the best word to use, but those of you that stayed most connected to - even in the church - racial issues, you get an idea about the differences - the differences of opinion; how polarized these things can be. You don't feel that when it comes to circumcised - uncircumcised. Because we're not familiar with it. We don't have to deal with it. It's not familiar to us. It's not part of our experience. So we really don't get it. But let's try to get it again. I talked about it way back, but let's talk about it again.

Jesus is dealing with a Syrophenician woman and even He says the Jews are children; the Syrophenician woman is a dog. Jesus comes to a well in John 4. The woman is surprised that a Jewish man would even speak to her. And she says so. Jews don't have dealing with Samaritans. Do you know that when Paul has to rebuke Peter in Galatians, in his dialogue with Peter, he says we are not Gentile sinners. That was basically the attitude. Gentiles are lawless. They don't have the law of God. They don't have the true God. They're just sinners - Gentile sinners. That's how Paul, an apostle to the Gentiles themselves, would categorize Gentiles to another Jew. They're just Gentile sinners. Not without hope, but that's how he classified them.

You remember how, again, derogatorily - here's the Pharisees. You want to say something wicked about Jesus, what did they say? You're a Samaritan. You have a devil. You have a demon. Derogatory. You know what? There was hatred between Jews and Gentiles.

Both thinking themselves superior. Both at odds with each other. There was not unity. There was not harmony.

Do you know what the point of the second half of Ephesians is all about? It's that Christ's blood was shed to tear down; to destroy the barriers. You see that. Look at v. 14. "He Himself (this is Christ) is our peace who has made us both one." Ok, my agenda today is not to deal with Jew and Gentile other than how Jew and Gentile are a great reflection of black and white and any other racial issues that we have today. Listen, the same truth applies, that by the blood of Christ, black and white Christians are made one. That's a reality folks. Don't try to tear that down. Don't try to back away; don't try to wiggle your way out of it.

And I'll just say this right off. Brethren, you know one of the truths that we find about Scripture, is that the devil comes and casts tares among the wheat. Have you ever read that? Anybody read that? What do you think that means on a practical level? You think it means we might have some tares in here? Or in the church at large? You think so? Let me ask you this. What color is their skin? The tares. What color do you think they are? If you were to examine their skin, what do you think? All colors.

You know what? Just because someone professes to be a Christian doesn't really mean they are. And if they in any way speak to you in a way that would cause you to back away from this reality, turn it off. I don't care if they're white; they're black, they're green. The reality is that if we are black and white and we are in Christ, we are one. We are not separate. We are not two distinct peoples. Yes, you may like Menudo. You might like grits. I may prefer steak. Well, you probably like it too. But, yes, we may have those flavors. But you need to consider your identity at the deepest level. We are one. That's what Scripture says. One.

"And He's broken down..." that means He's destroyed, "...in His flesh, the dividing wall of hostility." He tears it down. Now, I know, when it comes to Jew and Gentile, we may be speaking about legal realities - even realities from the Old Testament, but what I'm telling you is that the reality is the same. That among the Gentiles, no matter where we come from, no matter what our background is, no matter what country you were born in, no matter what language you speak, no matter what color your skin is, if we are in Christ together, we are one. That is the greatest point of our identity in all the world, the universe, eternity. That is the greatest reality. Our identity is in Christ.

Now listen, "we are made one." The reality is that Gentiles aren't made into physical Jews. There's a spiritual reality, but they're not made into physical Jews. Jews aren't made into Gentiles. What happens is this, and Paul clearly says this, all former categories dissolve away and are replaced by a new category. That's what you see right there in v. 15. "That He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two." Did you catch that? There's a replacement. The Gentiles don't replace the Jews. The Jews don't replace the Gentiles. Both categories are replaced by one new man.

And you know what happens? All these new men; all these new women, they are collectively together in what's called here "one body." Do you see that? v. 16? "...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross." Now as I said when we dealt with that text, that's not Christ's body. That one body idea shows up in Ephesians and in Paul's writings over and over, and he doesn't mean the body of Christ. He means the church. It's one body. Christ is the Head. One body. Do you know what it's comprised of? A bunch of people who were

formerly disunified Jews; disunified Gentiles. But now they're all together in one body. And what's happening? They're being reconciled to God. We've just come away from a season where "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," is commonly sung: "God and sinners reconciled." But you see, Paul's point here - it's not just any sinners; it's sinners who formerly in their lostness were so radically divided and now in one body, they're brought together. They have reconciliation together, both by way of the cross and be certain of this, there is no reconciliation at all apart from the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the church. It's reconciled. It's something absolutely new. Both Jew and Gentile. And you know what happens? The door gets thrown wide open to draw near to God for everybody in the body, and that's what you find in v. 18. We have access.

And notice, "for through Him, we both..." Don't you like how he keeps coming back and he says, "we both..." One new man in place of the two. We both have access. And again, I'm not wanting to deal primarily with Jew and Gentile today. I want to deal with every color of skin and ethnicity that we have in this room, because the reality is, there is a people here. And it doesn't matter what shade of skin we have, that by reconciliation through the cross the door has been opened so that we actually have real communion with God, and we can enter before Him.

Again, we're dealing with the greatest realities about our identity. Your greatest identity is not the color of your skin. Your greatest identity is the fact that you are one who has been paid for by this blood and the doors are thrown open for you to come right into the presence of God.

And you know what happened? I'm out there at Community Baptist Church. I'm not a pastor yet. I don't even know if I was preaching. But things are beginning to formulate in my head. Thinking about that pastor - it's now been made clear to me where I came from. It's like what is all that? And I'm watching the church at Community. I'm hearing verses like come out of Ephesians and there's a picture that begins to develop in my mind about what the church should be looking like. And the thing is here Paul's not done. Paul's not done. He just keeps going on and on. He wants to drive this point home over and over again. Your identity is no longer in your circumcision or your uncircumcision. It's no longer in the color of your skin. Your truest identity is not on that level. Your identity is somewhere else now. And look at v. 19. "...fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God."

But then he goes even further. The reconciled ones are all being - and here's that word - jointed or joined together. Fityly framed together. "...Into a temple for God to dwell in." And you know, the thing about it is some might wonder at that. I just said Paul goes even further. Does that even sound right? Some might wonder that I say Paul goes even further. Look, to go from family to building - it is really an escalation of imagery to go from the one to the other, but it might not feel like that. Why? Well, family seems warm. It seems loving. It's just not as nice a picture to think about building pieces in a wall.

Is Paul's imagery really escalating here? Oh yeah. Don't think warmth. Think cohesion. What's that word? That's like glue. Cohesive. Super glue. You glue something together. Adhesion or cohesion. It's the stickiness. It's something being stuck together or built together. That's the imagery of cohesion. Being furthered.

Is there cohesion in all being in the same country? To some degree. Is there cohesion in being in the same family? Yeah, maybe even more so. But when you're fityly framed together as

a piece of construction material into the same wall, you know what? There's a truer merging of parts than even in a family.

You say really? Yeah, you know what? One of the boards in that wall does not say, well, I think I'm going to get married and move to Missouri. They're together. You see, families - people can go different places. There is a closeness in family, but there's a cohesion in building parts that comes even closer. The idea of Jew and Gentile so closely fitly framed together into the same structure seems to be so exceptionally important to Paul that you know what? It's assumed that he actually invents a word right here. Now, I'm not the world's most renowned etymologist. (studier of words) But Lloyd-Jones says Paul invented it. He said there's no indication that the word ever shows up anywhere else in history; anywhere else outside of Ephesians. And it can't be found in any secular writing. It's thought that what Paul was doing was he was grasping for imagery or for a term and he was limited - limited enough in his own vocabulary that he needed to create a word to try to communicate to these folks exactly what he meant. And what he did was he basically took three separate words and stuck them all together in apparently what was an invention of his own.

The three words are this: The first one is "sun," which means "together with." The second one is "harmos." Now Jeff's going to correct me if my Greek pronunciation isn't right. You know, it's funny. As Americans we like to say about Greek or Hebrew, well, that isn't the way you say it. We actually had a Hebrew Christian sit at our table before. Brethren, he said words from the Old Testament in ways you would not even recognize them. And you know, we're correcting one another. Well, this is the way you say it. But if you actually heard the way that it was said in the original language, we'd probably all recognize that we're just doing good enough if we can communicate in our own Anglican pronunciation.

But, you have "sun" - together with; "harmos" which means "joint." Joined together with. And then "logeos" which is the verb of "logos," which has the idea to arrange in order. You know what happens? The King James Version actually comes the closest to striving to bring all three components out. They actually use three words in the English to parallel the three in the Greek. Fitly framed together. It's the idea of logeos is to arrange; like even an arrangement of music or an arrangement of a sentence. But it's to put something in order, and it's a picture - it's what God is doing to us. It's not something that we're doing to ourselves. God is placing in the church and joining together with and fitly framing. It's the idea of harmoniously fitting together. It is a tight cohesiveness.

And Paul just invents this word and says to these Gentiles, do you really recognize how one you are? How closely fitted together? And obviously there's something profound in this. When Paul does this; when he invents this, brethren, this is the church. That's what we have going here. That's what we have a picture of here. He wants to try to explain to these Ephesian Gentiles to feel their close cohesion with these Jews and with everyone else who's a Christian. God takes each one of these living stones and carefully arranges them by design, and He puts them in here and fitly frames - you think about framing a window. And they're fitted. It's almost like there's one after another and they're fitly framed together and joined together in cohesion and a tightness. This is the church. And do you know what the building blocks are? They're living stones, and they've got every different shade of skin under the sun. That's the reality.

Various nationalities, skin colors - they used to be separated, disjointed, unharmonious, conflicting, clashing.

It's like as a child, I remember I got a battleship model. Remember the old models? You put them together. I don't if young people even do that anymore. And you pull the top off and you basically have these frames of plastic with all the individual parts across there. And you've got, typically, several sheets of these things, and you pull them out. And you've got the big pieces like the halves of the hull and whatever, and you begin to put all these pieces together. At first, they're all disjointed. They're disconnected. But then you take out that model glue and you begin to put them together,. And you know, some of the pieces are the same. Many of them are not the same. They're not like each other. It's not like a cookie cutter thing. If you just opened it up and you had a hundred pieces that all looked identical, what do you create out of that?

It's the same with the church. Paul uses other illustrations in 1 Corinthians 12, but where do you get a body if everybody's an eye? You don't. Where do you get a battleship if everything is a gun turret? You don't. You end up with some ugly horrendous thing. It doesn't even go together. You could glue it all together, but it's going to be a monster. But as a child, you put all those pieces together. This is what God is doing in the church. Fitly framing.

And brethren, I'll tell you this. About 17 years ago, when we started this church, I was just naive enough to think and to actually believe that texts like this had real life implications. I believe that. I actually believed that if such radically different people as Jews and Gentiles could actually lose their own native identities and so identify with Christ, that they could come together in the same churches and function together and live together and love together and spread the Gospel together. I actually was naive enough to think blacks and whites could do that in San Antonio. Along with the majority population of the Hispanics. And thankfully, if God threw Asians into that mix as well. I thought it might be just reasonable enough to think that if we located our church meetings here on the east side of San Antonio, we might actually witness the same power that brought Jew and Gentile together bring all sorts of different people together here. That was my thinking. And you know what? Some might think that I'm reading too much into the passage in these last two verses of chapter 2. But the image produced in my mind, it wasn't just a theoretical image. It was an image that I saw came right down to local churches.

See, I didn't really imagine the temple being built and all the stones over there are black; and all the stones right there are white; and all the stones right there may have a reddish hue or a yellowish hue. I didn't see it like that. I saw them fitly framed together in my mind. Maybe you think I'm reading too much into it, but like I say, I was just naive enough to think that a brother with dark skin could be placed in there. And then a Hispanic sister could be placed next to that. And then an Asian sister could be placed next to that. And I actually believed, well, if God could do that back then, God can do that now. I mean, if God is capable. And the thing is, I didn't just think, oh, that's for heaven. See, we have to wait for heaven because here everybody's going to be in their Korean church; everybody's going to be in their Indian church; everybody's going to be in their white church; in their Hispanic church, in their black church. And we wait for then. Then, of course, it's all going to mix together. You see, I just kind of thought that the fact that we're being built together this way actually has to do with the here and now and right in our

generation. And I kind of thought that side by side we could work together for the sake of the Gospel.

Brethren, I'll tell you this. I did not know exactly how it would happen, but in those first seven months of the life of this church, this was becoming more and more of a burden. Now, let me tell you, we started by meeting on the south side of the city. I'm not going to say it's all Hispanic, but heavily so. That's where we had a Bible study for a number of years. But you know, as time went on, I didn't want to stay there. I had my eye on this part of the city. And I know there were voices saying well, that's not right. If God called you to be on the south side, who are you to be moving away from it? Well, I'll tell you what God was doing inside me was trying to think strategically - if we're going to have a church where blacks and whites and Hispanics and other ethnicities are likely going to come together, what I felt like was if we could be close to downtown and maybe actually off into a more black part of the city, I thought that's the strategic location to be. Now, you may take issue with that. But that was my whole thinking. My thinking was, let's go to where the needs are; let's go to where the prostitutes are; let's go to where the drug problems are; let's go to where they need the Gospel; but let's also position this where we're close to downtown. You've got maybe what tends to be the more white areas to the north. You've got the more black areas to the east. West side is little Mexico. South side is going to be heavily Hispanic, but it felt central. That was my thinking: central. Because that was the desire.

Now as I looked out at the church, it was all Hispanic in those first days except me. But I began to pray. I recognized, no matter where you are in this city, if God's working with us, Hispanics are going to be there. But it's going to take an extra effort to try to bring whites and blacks into the same church. So, strategically, where should we be? And I began to pray, Lord, please... And it wasn't just skin colors; I often prayed - those that were here in the early days, it was often that the converted lawyer would sit next to the converted prostitute, whatever their colors. But I wanted this different social strata as well. God saving from the rich. I know not many (1 Corinthians 1), but some and many of those in the poorer sections. Look, could we have moved up to the north side? Could we have moved up to Stone Oak? Yes, we could have. I mean, there was freedom there to do that. But that wasn't the agenda - not in my heart. Not based on texts like this. I had an image in my mind of this multi-colored fitly framed together, and I didn't want to wait to heaven for it. I wanted to see that cohesiveness worked out right now. Because brethren, I really believe that it's a testimony about the grace and the power of God. I believe that. I believe it says something about what the power of the cross is able to accomplish in people.

And I knew what I saw up there in Michigan - that was not a testimony to any power of any cross. Not that kind of - was it racism? Or was it horrible ignorance? Definitely not a man qualified to be in the pulpit. But did Jesus say this? Did He say, well, people will know that you're My disciples by the fact that blacks need to stay in their churches, and whites need to stay in their churches, and there's Hispanics in theirs. Because we don't love one another enough to work through the differences. Is that what He said? Is that how the world's going to know that we belong to Him? That is not what He said. What He specifically said is that "by this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Brethren, the truth is that

this is the truth. And you know it. If we can't make it in the same church together, it's a lack of love on somebody's part. That's just a reality. Plain and simple.

Do you remember the church there in Acts 6? Let me tell you about it. You don't feel this, but it's likely a difference of ethnicity stronger than blacks and whites in the same church. When you had Hebrews and Hellenist Jews in the same church. Did they have problems? Of course, they had problems! Brethren, some people walk around almost with this foreboding: "there are problems in this church." Of course there are! Were there racial problems in that church? Of course there were! Look, this issue isn't whether or not we have problems. The issue is that love works through those problems. You know what was happening? The widows - not any widow. Not widows indiscriminately. But the widows of a certain race in the church - the widows of the Hellenist Greeks. They were not being taken care of like the Hebrew widows were. That kind of a race thing. And it is. Somehow they were being neglected. Somehow they were being overlooked. You know what? Did the apostles say, Hellenist Greeks, this isn't going to work. The way to remedy this: pack your bags, go down the street, start a Hellenist Greek church. That's what we need to do. Because after all that's what just about everybody does today. That's not what they did. What they did was they looked at it and they said you know this is a reality. And they sought to meet the need. And what's interesting to me is that it has often been observed that the seven men that were chosen were actually Greeks. And I've thought about that. You know, that bothered me. That bothered me for a long time that they did that. Because I thought, shouldn't the Hebrews have been able to become deacons just as ably as the Greeks and minister to the Grecian widows? Why all Greeks? Well, it bothered me. Maybe it still does bother me a little bit that that happened that way, but maybe there's something to it. You don't have to pack up and move down the street and start your own church, but maybe there is something to Grecian men. Maybe they're more plugged in. Maybe they're more sensitive. Maybe they're more aware. Maybe they would be able to relate better. That's just a reality. We come from different backgrounds. Maybe it was better on a practical level. Well, that's what happened. Yeah, they had problems.

And you know what? I know that if we try to have multiple various ethnicities and different backgrounds - brethren, I've heard it said before in this church. I've heard it said. I know it's true. People have said they are now friends with and they hang out with people that in their lost state, they would have never hung out with; they would have never been friends with. Well, of course that's true. Of course it is. We ought to expect that that's going to be true. Because in our lost state, we were divided; we were disunified; we were unharmonious. There was clashing. There was no cohesion. We were hated by each other and we were hating one another. And that's fairly biblically descriptive of what lost people are like. But something's happened. And you know that church didn't remain just apathetic and indifferent to the needs - to the true needs of one of the ethnic groups in the church.

Brethren, through the years, I remember we had when we were over at Fatty's, an Indian family came from Houston. I asked them where do you go to church? Oh, we go to an Indian church in Houston. I travel over to Romania and they've got the Romanian church and the Gypsy church.

Now look, again, I'm reading Adoniram Judson. You know what, they saw converts among the British troops. He was an American missionary. But they saw converts among the

British troops. They saw converts among the Burmese, among the Taling people and among the Karens. And they put them all in different churches, but you know what? They spoke different languages. I understand that. Look, we've got to be able to communicate to one another in a language that we understand. Otherwise, we're not going to be able to preach to one another. We're not going to be able to communicate. You know, the whole Christian life is involved in so much communication. If you can't speak the same language, there are real barriers. And I understand that. I understand that with the Spanish-speaking group that meets here. We're trying to have interpretation, hopefully put the music in Spanish up on the screen. I understand that when there's linguistic differences. But the reality is why the Romanians and the Gypsies have to be in different churches when they know the same language and they both speak Romanian very fluently.

Do you know what happened when - the example I'm thinking of specifically, a bunch of Italians got converted in a revival situation in New York City. And I'm trying to think of the pastor who got so disgusted with the situation that he left. Was it Tozer? A well-known preacher saw where the white folks in New York City, they're preaching the Gospel. They were actually evangelistic, and you know what God did? Instead of saving a whole bunch of white people, He saved a whole bunch of Italians. Now, Italians might be considered Caucasian, but they were different. And you know what? The people in that church just felt like it just messed up their church too much. And so they shipped them all off and they started an Italian church. And whoever the preacher was there at the time said, uh uh, I don't like this. Was it A.B. Simpson? Anyway, I can't remember the name.

But I feel the same way. When I see those kinds of things happen it's like wait. Isn't something broken here? What are we saying? Are we saying that those people are too poor for them to be among us? I recognize this: That if we had gone up to Stone Oak, we would not be attracting people off of Hackberry and Cherry to come to that church there. Somebody recently told me but I don't know when they visited Hagee's church, but they were talking about all the rich people up there. That's up in Stone Oak. I recognize this, some rich people might be willing to come here, but most of the people from the inner city are not willing to go there. Perhaps. Perhaps there are some.

But I just felt like this was the most strategic if we're going to really seek to make this happen; see these parts come together.

Brethren, from time to time, I was reminded of this - Ruby and I met with Jonathan and Letty on Friday, and Ruby brought up how many different times, people who have visited our church from the outside and they have commented on the racial diversity here. And I've heard that too. I've heard those comments. How that blesses people because they say things like I haven't seen that before.

Brethren, let me tell you something. The racial diversity that we have at Grace is unique. I'm not saying we're the only place that has it. But it's unique and it's special. And look, it's not found in many other places.

And if we're going to keep this diversity, we need to fight for it. But here's the thing, you'll never fight for it unless you value it. See, I value it. Because I look at Scripture and I believe it bears witness to these verses. And I believe it bears witness to the reconciling power of the cross and of the blood to remove the barriers. When I hear about barriers being removed, again,

maybe you think I'm reading too much into the text. I recognize that there were Scriptural barriers between Jews and Gentiles. I recognize that. But when I hear about the barriers being removed, again, I'm naive enough to think that means every barrier that keeps any ethnicity apart. They have been broken down. And that our identities in the two old men that we used to be - us and whoever else you want to compare yourself to - have been dissolved if we're in Christ. And our new greatest identity is the new man.

Brethren, just recently, somebody mentioned Hudson Taylor. And I love Hudson Taylor. I love his example. Just recently, there's been some dialogue among some in the church about music, and maybe even racial aspects that affect the music. And it was suggested that maybe the example of Hudson Taylor might be brought in and applied to this situation. And I would agree.

What's the example of Hudson Taylor? I love it. I think there's something there for us to all glean from it. Hudson Taylor, unlike the others who went to China before him - Hudson Taylor and a man named Burns - he was used in a revival in McCheyne's church - they dressed like the Chinese. They wore their shoes - really uncomfortable horrible things. They grew their hair in that really weird 1800's way where they had the ponytail, but the front part was all shaved. So they had the hair that came off the back in a ponytail (incomplete thought). And you know, for a European, you're in that sun and that heat and it burns his head. He wore their clothes. So we look at that. And sometimes that can be brought up today. And it was suggested that if we want to reach east side blacks, shouldn't we be like Hudson Taylor? And I would say yes, we should be like Hudson Taylor. But here's the thing, Hudson Taylor went into China because he desired to see a Chinese church.

You see, brethren, I don't want a black church. I don't want a white church. If you're going to use Hudson Taylor, what you want to think about is what would Hudson Taylor have done if instead of just reaching the Chinese, he wanted to reach blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and whites all at the same time? You might say, well, he probably would have dressed really funny. How do you do that? Well, you know what? When we came here to the east side, I didn't know. I remember we moved to Hackberry. And it was like, ok, we bought the place, and it had a glass front door. And I have this image in my mind of us kind of looking out that door. Ok, we're here. What do we do? I don't know. But I know this, our mandate is to preach the Gospel. I remember going down to that Salvation Army over there on Nolan. We're speaking to people about the Lord. We're handing out tracts, and this guy says, I don't know why you all came to the east side. He said you're never going to change the east side. I said you're right, but God will. That's my hope.

Brethren, do you know what you find when you go to chapter 4 of Ephesians? You find that the same word is used: fitly framed together. Paul doesn't just use it once. He uses it twice. And he talks about us being joined and built together. Again, fitly framed together. And he specifically says this: "when each part is working properly." Don't you like that? You know what needs to happen if this thing is really going to work? Each part needs to work properly. You see what they did in Jerusalem? We've got seven guys over here who aren't yet exactly working just properly right. We need to put them in this position where they make sure that the widows are being fed over here. And once they were properly working up to their gift and the need in the church, then the thing was good.

Let's be fair. The church came to the east side. It didn't go to the north side. Let's be fair in the evaluation of our ministries. Men of every ethnicity - not every nation in the world, but you think about the men who have stood in this pulpit and preached. It hasn't just been one color, one ethnicity. Think about our evangelism. Have we tried to reach UTSA? Yes, we've tried to reach SAC. We actually have tried to reach every single college campus in the city. But we didn't bypass St. Phillips. When we've done nursing home ministries, we haven't gone up to Stone Oak or the Dominion. The vast majority of nursing home ministry that's been done out of this church has been right on Nolan Street. Anybody that's ever been there, they can tell you the ethnic makeup of that place.

Do you know in our missions - the missionaries we've supported; the missionaries we've sent out - you're pretty hard pressed to find any kind of Caucasian people that we have sought to reach out to. There's been some perhaps. You've heard me talking more recently about Poland and Ireland. But that's after 17 years. Primarily our outreach has been what? Indians of India, The Nepalese of Nepal, or the Nepali, Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Indonesians; again Papua, Indonesians. To be fair, and I'm bringing that up because there have been comments made that have come to my ears about the fact that our church is not given sufficiently to certain social justice issues. Listen, you're not showing due justice to any race or ethnicity, unless you're willing to take the Gospel to them. And that has been the primary agenda of this church and will continue to be the primary agenda. The reality is our Grace Houses have housed Asians, Hispanic, black, and white. That's just a reality. The reality is that when we have had schools, children of different ethnicities have been in those schools. When we've had programs for helping husbandless mothers, that's primarily been blacks that have been helped.

Brethren, here's the thing. This body, made up of all these different pieces and parts and different colors and ethnicities. It's not cookie cutter. God loves diversity. He loves to make us different. And you know what we should expect? Different people in the church are going to have different burdens? You know what my burden is for the new year? My burden is that the Word of God might have power in this church. I preach. I want that to happen. I desire God would use me in that. We start the APT. I desire that reality. I have a burden to see harmony over in Poland. I have a desire, yes, to see a church started over in Ireland. I desire to see Jinotega protected and grow. I desire to see Monterey under Alberto really prosper. I desire that. I desire to see how God might use Diego and myself in Cuba or in Ecuador. I desire that. Those are my burdens.

And you know what? You may have different burdens. And that's ok. And your burden does not have to be my burden. You say what about bearing one another's burdens? Well, yes, but you need to bear mine just as much as I need to bear yours. You see, the reality is that if you have a burden for something that you don't feel like our church is (incomplete thought). You know, I've noticed that there's basically two kinds of people. There are the people that come along and they see a need and they go after it. They say there's a need, and I can answer that. I love that. I remember like Alex Dufre, she comes into the church and she's got a burden for this, and let's start this women's Grace House. That's where James Jennings was. He comes to talk to me about a men's Grace House and I've already been praying about that. I saw the example of Keith Green, and I thought, Lord, we need to do that. And so I'm praying, Lord, give us a house; give us a guy. And here comes James. You know, I've been burdened about this. Lay

hold on the need. Then you have the second kind of people that come in and say, look what they're not doing and they want to find fault with everybody. Well, you know what, if you see that there's a need, don't expect that I need to be burdened about the very same thing that you think there's such a dramatic need about. That's the diversity of the church.

Brethren, we have a calling: The Great Commission. Let's take that Gospel out. We're on the eve of a new year. I'll tell you what turns the world upside down, what changes this world: it's preaching Christ. What turn the world upside down; what Satan fears: praying people, righteous people, holiness. You know what he fears? He fears holy, righteous, praying people who love one another and love the world enough to take the Gospel out to them. He fears that. Because that does turn the world upside down. People get saved when that happens. His kingdom is damaged when that happens. Brethren, I think, racial diversity in this church is something to fight for. I think it's a good thing. I think it's a testimony to the world. And you remember this: Jesus said they'll know that you're My disciples when you have love for one another. Do you know what that means? That means that Jesus really did expect the world to be watching us. Believe me, they're watching. Your lost family members, your lost friends, your lost co-workers, they're watching. The world is watching.

Is this worth fighting for? To me, it is. To me, this construction, fitly framed together. Our truest identity: we are in the dwelling place of God. We are reconciled in one body through the cross. One new man in place of the two. I don't want a black church. I don't want a white church. You know what I want? I want a new man church. That's what I desire. (incomplete thought)

Have you ever noticed? You'll never see the same sunset twice. Ever. Now, you people that aren't from the north, you don't know this probably, unless you just heard it through the grapevine somewhere, there's never two snowflakes just exactly alike. They're always different. You think how different could they be? Oh, you just put your glove out and let them fall on there, and you begin to look at them. It's kind of like going out at night and looking up at the stars. Even Paul says there in 1 Corinthians 15 no two stars have the same glory. There's a glory of this and a glory of that. It's the same way in the building together of the church. There's a glory about every one of us. There's a specific glory. There's a specific distinctness. And in all that variety and distinction, there's a unity. There's a oneness. One new man in place of the two. One body. One kingdom that we're citizens of. One family. One building. Fitly framed together. And I pull in that text from Philippians. Side by side for the sake of the Gospel.

Look, I'll just tell you. I was here from day one. I was the first officer in the church. I think that God put a desire for this and a vision for this. It was a prayer that I have desired from the very beginning, that I think God to some degree has answered. I actually don't think it's naive to think that this should work here and now. And I hope that you will seek to fight for this as we go forward. Yeah, we're going to have problems. But we need to be thinking, how does love deal with this? For the sake of the Gospel, how do we move forward?

Listen to me carefully. The world out there is full of racism. It's full of disharmony. It's full of hatred. And if you rub shoulders with it, and I was talking about this last week on the Internet - a lot of what purports itself to be Christian, is not Christian. It's ungodly. It's wicked. And it's divisive. And look, it's not going to work. If your greatest identity is being white; if your greatest identity is being Mexican; if your greatest identity is being black, before it is finding your identity in Christ, then you're going to have a problem. You're going to have a big problem. Brethren,

this is an identity issue. Where is our identity at the deepest level? Identity. Brethren, I'm a Christian. If you're a Christian, you're my brother, you're my sister. We're being fitly framed together. If you lend an ear to the world, they will tell you this can't work. You ought to hate each other. You ought to stand up for your rights. That's not Jesus' message. That is not His message. So don't bring the world's trash in here in your minds, in your brains. Don't listen to it. You know what? Some people need to read their Bibles more than they need to listen to what's happening on Facebook.

May God help us. Father, please, nothing starts ahead of You. Lord, I believe that any burden that was given to me and to the rest of the brethren back there 17 years ago - Lord, that was Your doing. The idea to try to be strategic in making this happen; to have a desire, to pray, Lord, it was because You burdened us. And Lord, when we prayed, we've seen answers to those prayers. Father, my prayer is that as we move forward, Lord, I pray that there would be such an ethnic makeup of this church as would indeed show the power of God, the power of the cross, the power of regeneration. Lord, may we see the beauty of this fitly framed together work out right in our own midst. And I pray, Lord, I pray that You would raise up laborers to lead this church who are Hispanic and black and white, Lord, give us a variety in the leadership level, in elders, in deacons, in missionaries, in evangelists. Lord, I pray, bring us depth. Lord, we see that the real agenda is that we all attain to the full measure of the stature of Christ and we're all being united together in the same faith and the same doctrine and the same knowledge of the Son of God, and I pray Lord, that that would happen, and that it would be a reality in this church. Every piece. Every part working as it should when every piece and every part is working properly. It makes the body to grow so that it builds itself up in love. Lord, may that rule the day. I pray in Christ's name, Amen.