# I Want to Do More

*One new man, a wall torn down, and what we can actually do*

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| SPEAKER | Geno Hildebrandt |
| DATE | Sunday, June 7, 2020 |
| PASSAGES | Ephesians 2:11-22; Acts 15; Revelation 5:9; Galatians 6:2 |
| MESSAGE | Begins at 0:00:00 in the service |

## THE BIG IDEA

The deepest racial hatred of the first century, between Jew and Gentile, was overcome at the cross. Christ "himself is our peace": he broke down the dividing wall of hostility and created one new humanity, without erasing anyone's differences. That leaves no room for hostility in a follower of Jesus, and it gives us a reason to seek justice: these are our brothers and sisters.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Paul spent half his adult life bridging the gulf between Jew and Gentile, and he found the answer in the cross, which reconciles us to God and to one another.
- Differences are not obliterated in Christ; they are transcended. God created diversity and delights in it.
- "I don't see color" is not the answer. See it, celebrate it, and refuse to let it matter in how you treat people.
- If Christ abolished the hostility, a follower of Christ cannot walk in hostility toward people of another race. Each of us must examine the fear, anger or pride we carry.
- Christ does not just bring peace; he *is* our peace. Members of one body cannot be at war with each other.

- There is no such thing as racial superiority. White supremacy is to be condemned in the strongest terms.
- Start with humility: sit down with someone of another race, listen to their story, tell yours – and then act for their good as family.

▶ 1:08:16

After an online service of worship and communion, Geno turned to the week's news. Protests were continuing across the nation and in Austin, and at his Tuesday-night Zoom Bible chat the topic had been what the Bible says about race and racism. (The recording was corrupted, the only time that had ever happened to him.) One comment, repeated afterward in an email, stuck: "I want to do more, pastor, to help in the situation, but I don't know what to do."

## "I want to do more"

▶ 1:10:22

Most Christians, Geno believed, are asking how they can be part of the solution, and there are real ways to help. But he wanted to start where the apostle Paul did: preaching an end to division through the cross of Christ.

## A bitter divide

▶ 1:10:58

First-century Jews were an oppressed, impoverished minority, brutally conquered by Rome about a century before Christ, heavily taxed, with soldiers in the land to put down riots and collect the money. Geno read from William Barclay's *The Mind of St. Paul*: "No nation was ever more bitterly hated than the Jews." Cicero called their religion a barbarous superstition; Tacitus called them the vilest of people. Antisemitism, Barclay wrote, is no new thing. And the hatred ran both ways: many Jews took their chosenness to mean every other nation was rejected, and the Roman satirist Juvenal claimed a Jew would not even give a Gentile directions.

▶ 1:13:56

The problem for the church was acute: Jesus was a Jew, the first believers were Jews, and the faith had a message for all people – yet in the world's eyes it was "a Jewish thing." This was, Geno said, "a most vile racial hatred," running along lines of religion, culture and tribe. Paul's secret was that the gulf had been purposely overcome by the death of Jesus. The same sacrifice that reconciles us to God makes it possible for human opponents to make peace.

## The text

▶ 1:16:20

> "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands – remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."
>
> EPHESIANS 2:11–12 ↗

"Uncircumcised" was a put-down, Geno explained: an alien, spiritually empty, not one of us – no Jewish girl was to marry one. Paul piles up five descriptions of alienation, ending with "without God," the word that gives us *atheist*. And he says this to Gentiles who now belong to Christ: the divide was in the church.

▶ 1:18:31

> "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."
>
> EPHESIANS 2:13–16 ↗

The law stood between humanity and God, and Jesus took it out of the way by dying for the sins of Jew and Gentile alike, so both have the same access. That does not mean the law vanished from Jewish culture. The hostility it created is what was erased.

▶ 1:20:13

> "And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are 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. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."
>
> EPHESIANS 2:17–22 ↗

## 1. Differences transcended, not erased

▶ 1:21:45

Former strangers became brothers and sisters. If that hatred could be healed, Geno said, there is no racial division today that cannot be healed in Christ. But notice that Paul does not gloss over the differences. He does not say there are no more Jews or Gentiles; the two are transcended into one new man. Cultural, racial and even religious-practice differences remain. When some insisted Gentiles become Jews first, the first church-wide council in Acts 15 said no.

▶ 1:23:53

So we should recognize and celebrate our differences – dress, food, dance, language, hair, skin tone – and ask about them with respect. Geno, raised in both the Deep South and the Northeast, knows how different cultures can be. And stop saying "I don't see color," which he called mostly a white mistake: "We should see color, and then it shouldn't matter to us." Not seeing it disrespects what God has made. Instead: tell me about your background, how your grandparents lived. His own father's parents came from Italy; his mother's family traces back to the 1600s in America.

## 2. Hostility abolished

▶ 1:26:56

Twice the text says the hostility is gone. For the Jew who knew the law condemned him, Christ fulfilled it and paid its price, so being right with God no longer depended on keeping rules. For the Gentile condemned for ignoring the law, Jesus paid that price too. Same access, same means – trust in the work of Christ – and one new man out of two.

▶ 1:28:24

"If Christ has abolished the wall of hostility between me and God and me and others, how can I in any way walk in hostility toward other people?" A follower of Christ cannot carry deep animus toward people of another race or even another creed. Each of us must look at the fear, anger or pride in our hearts, perhaps handed down in our families, and bring it to Christ. And this is not only for white people: "All of us carry these animosities in our heart." Making peace with God and then with others is spiritual maturity.

## 3. One new man

▶ 1:30:20

Racial distinctions are hardwired into the human race; God made us black and brown and white, "and he likes it." Culture is human-made, and God enjoys that too. Steve Hawthorne has taught at Hope about worship across the world's cultures, and Revelation 5 pictures people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation worshiping before the throne. "God wants it all. Who are we to despise any version of that?"

▶ 1:32:27

What about those outside the faith? We still belong to one another as image bearers of God and fellow human beings; in Christ that bond simply goes deeper and lasts forever. And if the Spirit is alive in us, we can recognize Jesus in brothers and sisters of every background, "even if they're yelling at us." Paul says we are being built together into a dwelling place for God. A church of one color and one language may have the Spirit, but it is not the complete expression of God. The full image is seen in the diversity of the body, "and I believe it's that picture that a watching world is hungry to see."

## 4. He is our peace

▶ 1:35:21

Listen carefully, Geno said. The text does not say he brought peace or made peace, though he did both. It says "he himself is our peace" – something deeper. Therefore Jew and Gentile, black, brown, yellow, white and red, cannot be at war with each other, any more than a body can be at war with its own colon. (He conceded he has been at war with his colon plenty of times.) We may not like each other's music. But we can say, "Tell me why you like that music."

## What can I do?

▶ 1:38:28

**Walk in humility.** Become learners, sit at each other's feet, and ask about each other's people and culture. We received the same gift, the same sacrifice, the same Jesus, the same Spirit, the same baptism into the same church. All those sames mean I belong to this person, and if we misunderstand each other it is up to me to go and learn.

▶ 1:40:00

**Unity in diversity.** "There is no such thing as racial superiority." White supremacy, Geno said, "is nothing more than Nazi dogma wrapped in southern American hatred," fanned by hell, with nothing redeemable in it. Yet every one of us wrestles with prejudice – trusting my own tribe because I know it. The fancy word is ethnocentrism. Followers of Christ must hold that prejudice up, examine it, and put it away, embracing every tribe as equally valuable to God.

▶ 1:43:03

One practical way is to bear one another's burdens by listening. Sit down with people of another race and ask two questions: When did you first become aware of your race? And when did you realize it was wrong to hold prejudiced attitudes? About twenty-five years earlier, Geno joined a group of five black and three white pastors who spent a year and a half telling those stories, painfully and with many tears. At the end there was "a deep and abiding trust" that carried them for two decades; the ones still living are friends today. "If it's frightening to you, take a deep breath and jump in."

▶ 1:46:04

**Peace and justice.** Rooting out hostility is an inner work, and it works itself out in justice. Listening to those pastors, it dawned on Geno that these were his brothers and sisters, struggling in his own city in ways he was not. He admits he is no natural justice warrior and has been criticized for it. But "these are my brothers and sisters and they're not being treated right," so you vote, protest, march, whatever it takes, "because they're my family."

▶ 1:48:37

He mentioned a *USA Today* list of a hundred ways to act against racism – contacting leaders, educating yourself, donating, volunteering, supporting minority-owned businesses, amplifying nuanced voices online. Then his own list for Christians. Pray for justice and peace and an end to racist policies and the prejudice in our own hearts – and pray with people different from you. Visit a black church or a Hispanic or Asian congregation and worship there. If they look at you funny, "just say Geno sent me."

▶ 1:50:30

Fifteen or sixteen years earlier, in a hurting season, Geno served for a year and a half on the staff of a friend's church where he and PJ were one of two white families. "That experience restored my soul." He also urged finding Christian organizations working on race, preferably led by people of color; speaking to civic leaders; and reading the history of black and Hispanic Americans, including their contributions. His black friends tell him, "I had to learn your history in elementary school, but you didn't have to learn mine." The three-color stoplight, he noted, was invented by a black man.

▶ 1:53:31

Jesus came to purchase for God people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, and he expects us to treat one another as family. The good news has power, Geno said, but those far from God see it in the way it changes us. "Let's be Jesus followers."

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

### SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Ephesians 2:11–12
- Ephesians 2:13–16
- Ephesians 2:17–22
- Acts 15:1–21
- Revelation 5:9
- Galatians 6:2

### FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. When did you first become aware of your own race, and what happened?
2. When did you come to see that prejudice you held, or were taught, was wrong? What changed?
3. Geno said differences are transcended in Christ, not erased. What difference in someone else have you learned to enjoy, and what is one you still struggle to understand?
4. What fear, anger or pride might be keeping you from people of another race or background?
5. Of the practical steps Geno named – praying together, worshiping with another congregation, listening to stories, reading history, acting for justice – which will you take this week?

### ABOUT THE SPEAKER

**Geno Hildebrandt** is Hope Chapel's senior pastor. Raised in both the Deep South and the Northeast, with grandparents who emigrated from Italy, he spent some twenty years in a group of black and white Austin pastors and served on the staff of a predominantly black congregation before coming to Hope. During the pandemic he led a Tuesday-night Bible chat on Zoom.

**Watch the full message:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qu--KZvz7nE&t=0s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.