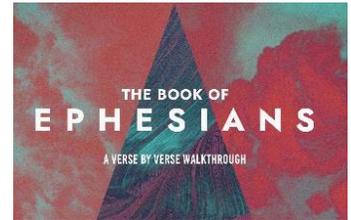


Title: Ephesians, Week 5, The Less-than-Me Attitude

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Ephesians 2.11-22

Big idea: Practicing the 5-R's can help us Root out and Remove a Less-than-Me attitude.



The Fall Bias

All that is bad in the world has resulted from what we call the Fall in the Garden of Eden. That is, Adam and Eve were perfect until they sinned, and we have inherited that sin nature and all its negative impacts in every sphere of life. One of those negative impacts is bias against certain kinds of people. It's called implicit bias. We are sometimes aware of this bias and sometimes not. The Bible often speaks such bias.

I will give some examples in a moment but want to contrast two phrases: *Not-like-me*; *Less-than-me*

Not-like-me Less-than-me

Not-like-me is simply recognizing that people around me are different from me in different ways. There is nothing wrong with noting those distinctions: different colored skin, different language, different dress, different personalities, etc. But the problem comes when our perspective shifts from an objective not-like-me to a prejudicial and sinful less-than-me, that is because of this difference, you are less of a person than me. Some words that describe this less-than-me attitude would be enmity, division, prejudice, bigotry, discrimination, intolerance, racism, etc.?

Now what might be characteristics in another person that might trigger people to have a less-than-me attitude? Historically, what has probably been the most prominent trigger for a less-than-me attitude?

Less-than-me Triggers

- Skin colour
- Accent
- Ethnic clothing
- Sexual activity or expression
- Homeless person
- A person with mental illness
- A down's syndrome child
- A disabled person in a wheel chair
- An older person

- **Vocations** can trigger it, "Couldn't get a better or more respectable job than that?"
 - **Orderly** in the hospital.
 - Dr. Ben Carson is a believer who was a famous neurosurgeon in the U.S. (he operated on Tiffany twice) and he ran for president in the US. In one interview he said that being a young, African American made things different in the work setting. He recalled that in his early days as a surgeon, nurses would often mistake him for a hospital orderly, and speak to him as such. "I wouldn't get angry," he remembered. "I would simply say, 'Well, that's nice, but I'm Dr. Carson.'" He

said, "I recognize[d] that the reason they said that was not necessarily because they were racist, but because from their perspective ... the only black man they had ever seen on that ward with scrubs on was an orderly, so why should they think anything different?"

- **police officers**: Unfortunately, today there is much disrespect for our police. I deeply respect our brave police officers.
- **truck drivers** (truck drivers are in the news lately)
- **janitors**
- **wait staff** at a restaurant
- **lawyers**
- **politicians** in the other party
- **newscasters**
- And of course, **preachers**
- *Last but not least*, for some of you who area secret Montreal Canadian fans, an obnoxious Toronto Maple Leaf Fan might trigger you.

Did I step on pretty much everybody's toes by now?

We probably all have one or more of these biases. So, what do we do about them? Well, that's what the Apostle Paul addresses in this passage, this less-than-me attitude.

Here's today's big idea.



A quick review of last week.

Big idea: Three spiritual realities in Christ give us victory over three spiritual enemies.

Three Enemies

1. World
2. Flesh
3. Devil

Three Spiritual Realities

1. A grace empowered new life (saved by grace). We have a new power because we are in Christ by God's grace through salvation.
2. A new position in Christ (seated with him in the heavenlies) We have a new position that while we are in the fray of life, we are also above the fray.
3. A prepared assignment (s) for Christ (created in Christ Jesus to do good works).

Today's passage is [Ephesians 2.11-22](#).

[Ephesians 2:11](#)Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,¹⁵ 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,¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Among the many broken places our world is dealing with now is racial division. In the past year or so, we've seen racial divides rise to levels we haven't seen for maybe decades. In biblical days the primary racial divide was between these two ethnic groups, Jews and non-Jews, called Gentiles (which means belonging to a certain clan or tribe).

Here are some examples from that time period.

1. For Jews it was not lawful to aid a Gentile woman in giving birth, for that would bring another heathen into the world.¹
2. If a Jew married a Gentile, the funeral of that Jew was carried out²
3. The Roman gentiles considered those not like them, barbarians.
4. The Gentiles were called dogs by the Jews (dogs were not the nice pets we have, but mongrels), and the Jews were considered by some Gentiles as homicidal enemies of the human race.³

The root of this alienation, and the root for any less-than me attitude, is not primarily social or cultural or economic, although we can't ignore those factors and Christians must address them. The fundamental root of alienation from each other and God is spiritual, a fundamental heart issue as a result of sin.

Ephesians 2:11 Therefore,

When you read the NT and you see a therefore, always ask yourself, "what is the therefore there for?" This therefore reaches back to what Paul said in verses 1-10. Second generation Ephesian Gentile Christians were apt to forget their former disadvantages, before Christ.

remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)

For a non-Jew to come into the Jewish faith, one of the things they had to do was to be circumcised. To be called uncircumcised was an insult and Paul is simply repeating what some Jews used when they referenced those who were not Jews.

But in repeating that insult, he reminds the insulters, Jews who had rejected Christ, that they have nothing to boast about in their man-made physical mark of circumcision for it holds no spiritual significance. It doesn't matter who you are, Jew or Gentile repentance and faith in Christ are necessary. he's simply referencing some of the specialness to God are the Jewish people

He next describes, as he is writing to Gentiles, that they once were separate from Christ.

¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

He's contrasting Jews from the non-Jews.

Unlike the Jews who believe in a coming Messiah, the Gentiles didn't.

- The Gentiles were not a part of a nation that held to one God, as did the Jews.
- The Jewish people had the promise that from their people would come the Messiah (Jesus was a Jew). The Gentiles didn't have such a promise.
- The gentiles were without hope. For the Greeks, underlying everything was a sense of essential despair. They had no hope because they were without God.
- The Jewish view was that history was going somewhere, no matter what the present was like. On the other hand, for the Gentiles, history was going nowhere, it was cyclical. Events simply repeated themselves. The gentiles were at the whim of capricious gods.
- The Jews had a God who had promised a Messiah and ultimate deliverance and heaven.
- Without God: the word in the original is the one we get the word atheist from. They believed in many false gods but not the one true God.

He's inferring this timeline sequence of salvation history.

¹ Hughes, R. K. (1990). *Ephesians: the mystery of the body of Christ* (pp. 87–89). Crossway Books.

² Barclay, W. (2002). *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (p. 123). Westminster John Knox Press.

³ Hughes, R. K. (1990). *Ephesians: the mystery of the body of Christ* (pp. 87–89). Crossway Books.

Timeline of Salvation History

First the Jewish people came

↓ Then Christ the Messiah came →

Then the Gospel was proclaimed to Jewish people

↓

Then the Gospel was proclaimed to Gentiles

Timeline of salvation history

First the Jewish people came. (and the promises of the Messiah)

Then Christ the Messiah came.

Then the Gospel was proclaimed to Jewish people.

Then the Gospel was proclaimed to everybody else (Gentiles).

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

By faith in Christ on the cross, a person who is far from God, is brought near, that is reconciled to God.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

This is such a beautiful statement, "*For he himself is our peace*". He is both peace and peacemaker.

Now remember the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. This huge spiritual barrier kept them at odds with each other, as it does for us.

Although not many in Paul's audience would have knowledge of a unique feature of the temple area, Paul did. Josephus, an ancient historian, described a **wall** in the Jerusalem temple separating the court of the Gentiles from the temple proper. On it was an **inscription** that read: "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." (expositors) This inscription has been found in excavations.

Jesus breaks down those barriers of who's in and who's out by creating what theologians have called a new spiritual race, so to speak, of all who are in Christ who are now at peace with God and should be with each other. Fundamentally this wall of a superior attitude was destroyed by Christ's work on the cross.

He next explains how Jesus' death destroyed this dividing wall.

¹⁵ 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,

Making the two one does not mean we don't recognize and appreciate our ethnic or national distinction. But Christ has made all believers into one new spiritual race. In Christ there is no division, some in the in group and some in the outgroup.

Christ fulfilled the *moral* law, keeping all its requirements, but he abolished the Jewish *ceremonial* law. Thus, the requirements of the ceremonial law (the washings, the Sabbath restrictions, etc.) which had been such a barrier were gone. And since he fulfilled the moral law, taking away its condemnation, all have free access through grace⁴?

¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Reconcile is a word for bringing together friends who have been estranged. So, Jesus' death on the cross was not only to reconcile Jew and Gentile to each other but both of them together to God Himself. Jesus killed the hostility between God and man.

So, now a third kind of person has emerged, not Jew, not Gentile, but Christian, by the work of Jesus on the cross. Jesus' ministry, and ours, is one of peace and reconciliation.

⁴ Hughes, R. K. (1990). *Ephesians: the mystery of the body of Christ* (p. 92). Crossway Books.

Fostering this peace and reconciliation is also our job, individually and corporately, the Church itself. We must be peacemakers and that can't happen unless we deal with our secret or not-so-secret divisive, less-than-me biases.

¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

The word access would have evoked an image in the person at that time. It was the word used for an official in a king's court that conducted visitors into the king's presence. So, we see the work of the Trinity here.

Through the work of Christ united in one Spirit, believing Jews and Gentiles have access to the Father. The initiation and continuation of a person's relationship to God involves all three persons of the Trinity.⁵

Because of the work of Christ, God is approachable.

He now describes this new race with powerful visuals, a city, a family, and a great building.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,

A foreigner and an alien were always on the fringe in the Roman world if they were not citizens. A foreigner would be like a tourist traveling through Canada. With a visa they have temporary rights in Canada. An alien would be like a legal resident in Canada with more rights but not all. A citizen has full rights.

To be a citizen of a country affords great privileges. When someone is displaced from, say, a war-torn area of the world and comes to Canada and finally becomes a citizen, that is reason for great joy.

Likewise, in the Roman world being a citizen was an even greater source of pride. Paul is saying that spiritually we are not just naturalized citizens, but super-naturalized citizens of God's Kingdom. At one point they/we were foreigners and aliens to God. But now they/we are fellow citizens, possessing a citizenship far superior than Roman citizenship or Canadian citizenship.

We now belong in God's Kingdom. You belong here in this local expression of God's Universal Church, WestPark Church.

He also uses the idea of a family. He says we are now members of God's household. We have a new eternal family with a perfect father, God Himself. And our family is to be a safe, welcoming, and accepting place.

Having been reconciled to God through Christ first and made citizens of His Kingdom and part of His family, we now have the resources to be reconciled to others and resist the less-than-me divisive bias.

The third image is one of a building. For centuries the physical Temple was the focus. In Jewish history there were actually 3 buildings over the years that served as the temple. Their faith was geographically grounded then. Ours is not.

²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Paul describes this new temple with three elements: a foundation, a cornerstone, and building blocks.

Jesus is the chief cornerstone, the historical apostles and prophets are the foundation, and the saints, believers, are the building blocks.

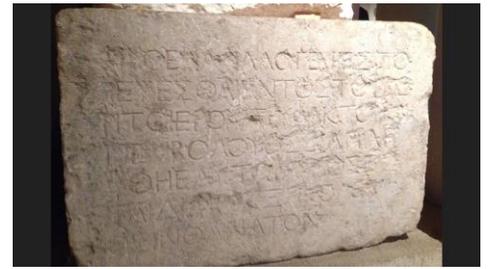
These apostles were both those who saw Jesus and were designated as apostles as well as those with the gift of apostleship. Prophets were probably contemporaries of the apostles, living in the NT age and doing their ministry in the early church. Both probably had overlapping leadership and influence roles.

⁵ Hoehner, H. W. (2002). *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (p. 389). Baker Academic.

God has given certain significant gifts to certain people in the church that we'll see later in this series. But here is a key verse.

Ephesians 4.11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

As important as a physical building's foundation is, the cornerstones were very important. You line up the building using a **cornerstone**. It is an oversized stone compared to the rest. The cornerstone in antiquity was the first stone laid and had to be set at the perfect angle because everything else about the building was dependent on and measured by how that stone was laid. It was the most important stone determining the stability of the foundation, its symmetry, and really the character of the entire building. All the other stones are adjusted based on this corner stone. It was laid first.



The Jerusalem temple has huge cornerstones, the size of a railroad boxcar.

Paul is emphasizing that Jesus has the most important position even over the apostles and prophets.

21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Now he writes about the building blocks that join the building together. In those days they didn't use mortar but would cut and smooth stones so that they fit together perfectly next to each other.

Who are the building blocks? You and me, Jesus' followers. We are being build up, together to become a dwelling place for God by His Spirit.



For the church, this implies that our fit with each other must be good, like the fit of these blocks. In other words, our relationships much reflect unity and harmony with each other or we're going to have pretty porous and unstable church.

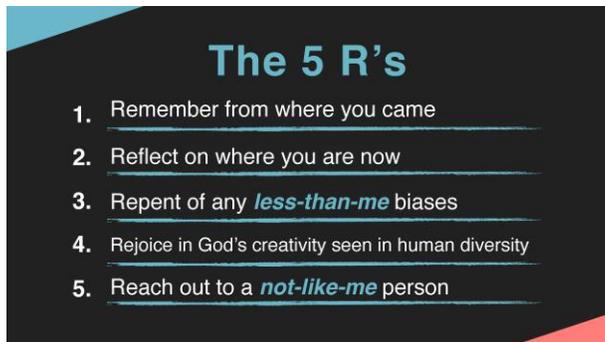
So, just as the stones in the temple are properly placed to form a complete building, so are all believers, prepared by the teaching of the prophets and apostles, under the influence of God's spirit, become a place where God continually dwells.

The Message paraphrase captures it well.

20 He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone 21 that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, (The Message)

Remember the big idea?

The big idea: Practicing the 5-R's can help us Root out and Remove a Less-than-me attitude.



1. Remember from where you came (we were separated from Christ, far from him, without hope and without God). We must not forget from where we came, not to dwell on it but to dwell on the next R. This one makes the next one so good.

2. Reflect on where you are now (in Christ).

- You have 24/7 access to God.
- You are not less than anybody else because has made one new spiritual person, Christian.
- You are a citizen of the Kingdom with all its privileges.

- You belong in the family of God.
- You are part of His new spiritual temple, the church.
- A good exercise to drive this home is to put your name in place of every time Paul uses the word you, we, or our. Here is an example, *For he himself is our peace. For he himself is Charles's peace.*

3. Repent of any known *less-than-me* biases.

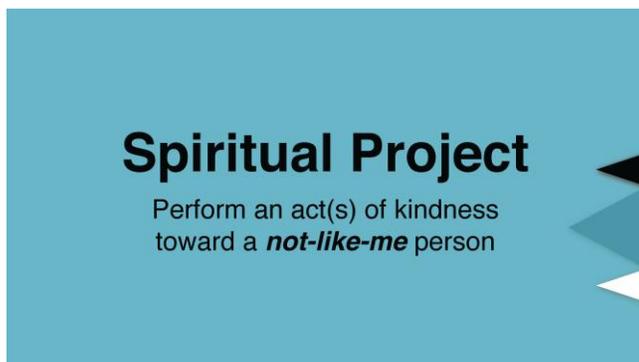
If all these blessings in Christ are now mine, how dare I look at others as less-than-me.

4. Rejoice in God's creativity seen in human diversity. This one new spiritual people, Christians, does not mean we don't celebrate God's amazing creativity in how we are all different in different ways.

This next one is where the rubber meets the road.

5. Reach out to a *not-like-me* person. Move beyond your bias, fear, prejudice, or any less-than-me attitude and move toward that person.

This next week, consider this [Spiritual Project](#) related to this last R.



Perform an act(s) of kindness toward a *not-like-me* person.

Serve them, minister to them, strike up a conversation with them, start a relationship with them, do a tangible act of kindness toward a person who has a characteristic that triggers you to give in to the less-than-me bias.

If you were to share an insight with a friend in a sentence, what would you share?