

## THE COMPASS

# The Super Glue Gospel

Doug Brendel

Let's go to Hollywood.

Not exactly Hollywood, but the Hollywood of ancient Turkey: the city of Ephesus.

Two thousand years ago, Ephesus — just like L.A. — was a big city, actually the fourth-largest city in the entire Roman Empire. Some estimate there were as many as half a million people there.

It was a wealthy city.

It was also, just like L.A., a huge tourist trap.

There were things to see, places to go.

Ephesus had an incredible 25,000-seat theatre carved into the rock of one of its hillsides.

But the centerpiece of Ephesus — the mainstay of its entire economy — was the thing that thousands of tourists came to see every year: one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis.

By the time the apostle Paul came through town, the temple was already more than 500 years old.

The temple of Artemis was bigger than a football field, four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens.

This temple was made of marble. It had 127 columns, 60 feet high.

It was full of works of art, four bronze statues, a bunch of silver statuettes, golden pillars, the works.

And it was all dedicated to the goddess Artemis, the Greek goddess of the moon, and goddess of the hunt.

(The Romans called her Diana; the Greeks called her Artemis.)

In ancient mythology, she was the daughter of Zeus, the sister of Apollo.

She was the virgin goddess who valued chastity but helped women in childbirth, but she was also a killer: she shot a mean bow-and-arrow — and in conflict situations, she was known to kill for spite.

The people of Ephesus revered Artemis. She was their favorite god, out of the entire pantheon of gods.

When Paul the apostle came to Ephesus, talking about the one true God, the Ephesians were not happy campers.

I mean, people would come from all over the world to pay homage to Artemis at this temple, and to please her, they would leave piles of money and gifts.

The silversmiths were doing fabulous business, because everybody wanted a little statue of Artemis for their home, on top of all the other little idols representing all the other gods of their pagan faith system.

Paul was preaching against the biggest draw in town, the one personality drawing more tourists and generating more dollars than anyone or anything else for miles around.

In fact, **Acts 19** in your Bible is the historical account of the silversmiths getting so riled at Paul and how he was threatening their idol-making business that they stirred up the entire city, a huge mob gathered in the 25,000-seat theatre, they seized a couple of Paul's Christian friends — it's an amazing account.

Paul wanted to go into the theatre and confront the crowds, but it was so dangerous that his other Christian friends wouldn't let him.

Finally one of the local politicians stood up in the theatre and pleaded with the people to settle down — in fact, he threatened them with jail — to keep them from breaking into a full-scale riot.

And soon, it was time for Paul to leave town, move on in ministry elsewhere — and then later, he wrote back to his friends at Ephesus.

But here's the amazing thing about the Christians at Ephesus — the sad and surprising thing:

Their big problem, the problem Paul decided to write them a letter about, was not how to deal with the pagans who were worshipping a goddess who killed for spite, or how to deal with money-grubbing materialistic business owners just out to make a buck off the tourists,

or how to survive in a city where people were so angry at Christians that they would almost riot.

Even in the midst of all these serious issues, the BIG problem for the Christians in Ephesus was ATTITUDE. Division. Dissension. Getting along together.

Can you imagine?

This is what we deal with our teenage children about, for Pete's sake! Attitude!

The picture Paul paints — he doesn't put it exactly like this, but if you read through his letter to the Ephesians, you get this idea — is of little kids, the way they make up a club, and they make rules for their club, and they keep some kids out of their club, and then the kids who aren't in the club are baaaaaad, and those of us inside, in the club, are goooooood.

In Ephesus, the division — the misunderstanding — was between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

They couldn't seem to get together, or stay together.

They were hung up on their differences, or at least their perceived differences.

Even though they were under fire in this city full of hostile non-Christians, they weren't united in their efforts to defend themselves or promote the Gospel.

They were spending their energies dickering over the details and bickering over the boundary lines.

So Paul addresses this issue. He says, in essence, Hey guys, these divisions are pointless.

Our differences are old news.

Sure, some of us are Jews, some of us are Gentiles.

Some of us come from the very religious background; some of us come from an utterly irreligious background.

It's like my own marriage: I grew up in the classical Pentecostal tradition, extremely religious — and when I met my wife Kristina she was a nothing. Technically she was a lapsed Unitarian; I don't know how you can even *do* that.

Some of us have lived a lifetime of searching for God. Others of us have spent most of our lives not even knowing we needed him.  
But once we realize our need for God, we're all on the same team.

How did we get to this point? How did we come together? Paul explains the sequence of events, in chapter 2 of his letter to the Ephesians.

First, what were we before?

In the space of about 5 lines, he uses the terms *separate, excluded, foreigners, aliens, hostility, barrier, dividing wall, without hope, without God, far away.*

Y'all were in SAD SHAPE!

But then he turns a corner. The picture starts to morph.

You were separate, you were excluded, you were foreigners, you were without hope and without God — but something changed.

Someone came along and made things different.

Who was that masked man? Young Jewish fellow ... a tradesman ... member of the carpenters' union.

Jesus! Jesus did it!

Here's how Paul puts it:

#### **Ephesians 2:**

**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.**

Jesus exploded the barriers between us — the Jew vs. the Gentile, the religious guy vs. the heathen, the person who feels he has the inside track to God vs. the person who knows he doesn't. The drinker vs. the teetotaler. The gossip vs. the hypocrite!

"He himself is our peace."

If I receive the sacrifice of Christ, and you receive the sacrifice of Christ, then regardless of my failures from day to day, we're in this together. We're fellow travelers.

We can disagree, we can challenge each other to live more productively, we can call each other to a higher standard within God's design, we can chew through difficult issues — but we're finished fighting each other.

We're done excluding each other.

There's no place left for hostility.

Jesus **“destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”**

Jesus blasted all the walls out the way.

We're at peace with each other, because Jesus himself is our peace.

All we're obligated to is loving each other.

\* \* \*

Now how is this going to work? What will it look like? What does it take, in practical terms, to live in unity with my fellow travelers?

#### **Ephesians 4:**

**1 ...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**

In other words, don't go back to that “us against them” mentality. Don't let the barricades go back up between you.

**2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.**

Ahhh... Sounds nice. When I feel that impulse to put up a wall between myself and the other person, I just have to get back to humility and gentleness, patience and love.

So from here on out, then, life is simple, right?

No. It's not. Why not? Because it's hard. Because we're human.

Because it's not natural for people to cling together. It's natural for people to break apart.

I'm not naturally humble. I'm naturally proud.

I don't automatically respond in a gentle way when someone annoys me; my natural tendency is to be abrupt, harsh, mean.

Patience? Not me. I'm in a hurry for you to come around to my way of thinking, or get the heck out of my face.

If I have to “bear with” you — if I'm forced to be patient with you — it ain't about love.

Not typically. It's not about getting whatever's best for YOU.

I want what I want, and I want what I want when I want it.

And even if I'm humble today, my pride will tend to come back.

Even if I'm gentle with you today, the next time we have a difference of opinion, I may well have the urge to lash out at you.

Or let's say I manage to be patient in dealing with you today. Tomorrow, my tendency will be — Hey, I was patient with you yesterday! Now *come on!*

Man oh man, this is going to be WORK.

The barriers won't stay broken. The wall between me and the people I'm supposed to love? It keeps re-appearing!

I keep building it back up! I'm like the zombie wall-builder of Ephesus!

It's my automatic response to separate myself from you.

Even though God gave us the gift of unity — he made a way for us to be together, to be on an equal footing, so we wouldn't have to jockey for position and fight with each other — *we* have to *maintain* this unity.

We have to tend to it. Or it vanishes!

Which is why, in the very next line, Paul says these profound words:

**Ephesians 4:**

**3 Make every effort** [*in the original language of the Scriptures, the term is spoudazo: it means endeavor, be diligent, LABOR — it means put your nose to the grindstone, boy, because this is going to be hard*] **to keep the unity of the Spirit** [*this gift that God has given us*] **through the bond of peace.**

“Through the bond of peace.” What on earth is he talking about?

This isn't the kind of bond you buy from the United States government.

It's not what you pay to get your brother-in-law out of jail.

It's not that magical thing that a mother and her baby feel for each other.

It's not even handcuffs.

The word *bond* is sometimes also translated *band*.

It's like ligaments. Not something that chains you and restricts you — but instead, tough material, like the stuff that connects your bones at the joints in your body.

This is a bond that makes you stronger.

This is the Super Glue kind of bond.

And Paul is saying you're going to have to endeavor, be diligent, make an effort, labor, WORK at it — but you can keep this unity if you employ the bond of peace.

Who is our peace? Jesus himself.

This is not a philosophical concept. Our peace is a Person.

Our peace comes in a very recognizable, tangible package.

Paul is saying, you are glued to Jesus, your peace — and you will find that when something challenges your unity, if you remember whom you're glued to and why, peace will prevail in your heart and your mind.

If you and I are both glued to the same Guy — and he's my peace, and he's your peace — then you and I are going to be able to sort out any conflict serenely.

If we both recognize that Jesus suffered and died for the purpose of tearing down any walls between us — if we consciously remember this when we get into a conflict situation — our hearts are going to be calm when we sit down to talk about our differences of opinion.

The wall between us has been shattered into a million pieces, but our unity is rock-solid — because we're both glued to the same Jesus.

What is the glue? Let's be clear. This is not just a clever analogy. This is reality. We have to LIVE here.

The glue is my faith. My trust in God. My conscious decision to believe God to be telling me the truth when he says to me, in this book of Ephesians, that Jesus is my peace.

If I am trusting God to tell the truth, if I am believing in Jesus to be my peace, then my brain works differently, my emotions work differently, my mouth works differently.

You get into a situation where someone embarrasses you, and you don't feel like being humble — they're obviously inferior to you! — instead of a pride response, what springs up within you is ... peace!

That pride response doesn't feel right anymore. It doesn't taste good. It kind of backs up in your throat. Because you're Super Glued to Jesus, who is your peace!

Now, when I discover someone in my personal spiritual community, my circle of friends, doing something unspeakably dangerous and stupid, and my tendency would normally be to clobber him (or her), that response doesn't feel right — I respond more gently, because I'm Super Glued to Jesus, and he's my peace. Even though I'm in panic mode because I urgently want this person to understand the truth about this situation and not do this dangerous, stupid thing anymore, I feel peace. I realize not only that God is in control, but also that Jesus put me and my dangerous, stupid friend on an equal footing. Jesus is my peace.

And so now, when I have a theological difference with someone, and I know I'm right but they just don't get it — I wouldn't normally be patient, except that I'm glued to my peace, so my response is peaceful. Somehow, supernaturally, I'm patient with that person. A miracle!

And so now, when someone is unloving toward me — even when they're hateful toward me, when they assassinate my character and try to ruin my reputation — I can actually love that person, pray for that person, bless that person. Because I don't feel high anxiety over the treatment I'm getting. What I feel is what you feel when you're glued to peace. Jesus is my peace.

I don't have to go to war. I can preserve the unity of the Spirit. How? Through the bond of peace. Jesus is my peace. We are both about the same person, and that person is Jesus — the one who makes it possible for us to love God and love each other.

Let's also be clear what glue DOESN'T do.

I have the gift of unity with you, but I am not glued to you.

You are not my peace. You don't have to be glued to Jesus. The only one I am responsible for keeping glued to Jesus is ME.

I think it would be better for you if you were glued to Jesus, if he were your peace too — but I can't make our unity contingent on your glue.

This works best if we're both glued to Jesus — but I can't wait for you to get glued.

I gotta go there myself.

I want him to be my peace NOW.

You can come along whenever you want.

If we all wait for the other guy to get glued to Jesus, we're going to have chaos. It won't smell a THING like the unity of the Spirit!

If I spend my energy pointing out how different you look when you claim to be glued to Jesus, it won't feel like unity.

There isn't a separate Jesus for the Baptists and the Catholics. There isn't one Jesus for the conservatives and another for the liberals. There is just Jesus.

In the very next line, Paul says:

**Ephesians 4:**

**4 There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called —**

**5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;**

**6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

We are in this together — the divisions are bogus and counter-productive.