

Prince of Peace

Ephesians 2:14-18

In Ephesians 2, we come now to a section in which the Apostle Paul deals with Christ's role as the great peacemaker among men. Here we will see him in fulfillment of that prophecy in Isaiah 9:

**6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)**

Prince of Peace: this title belongs strictly to Jesus. At Jesus' birth **"there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"**" (Luke 2:13-14).

On the night Jesus was betrayed He said to His disciples, **"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."** (John 14:27). And again He said to them, **"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."** (John 16:33).

After His resurrection Jesus appeared to His frightened disciples and simply proclaimed, **"Peace to you,"** (Luke 24:36; John 20:19,21,26).

In Ephesians 2:14-18 the apostle Paul gives us the way of peace. He describes how Jesus Christ bridged the widest chasm which ever has existed between men -- the gulf between the Jew and the Gentile. If you don't think that conflict can claim title to being the most difficult gulf to bridge, I suggest you consider why it has been so difficult to settle the Arab-Israeli problem in the Middle East. Isn't it ironic and sad that the very birthplace of the Prince of Peace has known nothing but conflict and war for centuries?

Listen for the key word, peace in this passage as I read it to you, Ephesians 2:14-18:

**14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has
broken down the middle wall of separation,
15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of
commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one
new man from the two, thus making peace,
16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through
the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.
17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to**

those who were near.

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

Paul uses the word peace in three different verses in that passage: In verse 14, speaking of Christ Paul writes, "**He Himself is our peace.**" In verse 15 Paul says, and He has made peace, "**thus making peace**", and in verse 17, "**He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.**" In those three occurrences of the word peace, you have Paul's outline of how Christ makes peace. He is our peace -- that is the basis of peace. Then there is the process of peace, how He actually brought it about -- He came and made peace. Finally there is the means to possess that peace -- he preached peace.

And before we dive into the meat of this passage I want to stress this to you: this teaching is not just academic, it's not just a doctrine to accept with your mind. It is a principle that God wants to work out in your life today. If you are having a conflict with anybody -- whether it is in your home, at your work, in your neighborhood, in the church, or in the world, this is the way of peace. This is the secret of peace. This is the key to peace.

I. The Basis of Peace: He Himself IS our Peace (2:14).

In the previous verse, 2:13, Paul said that the blood of Christ has made it possible for us to be brought near to God. Now Paul says that Christ makes it possible for us to draw near not only to God but also to each other. Even two peoples as diametrically opposed as Jews and Gentiles can find peace together in Christ.

How is this possible? V.14 says, "**He Himself is our peace.**" In the Greek NT, this is an emphatic statement. It is meant to touch us profoundly, to go directly to our hearts.

The world cries out for peace and reconciliation. Men call for an end to the evils of prejudice, discrimination and hostility. Though man may long for such a utopia, it is not possible... apart from Jesus. Only in Christ can we bury any hatred and divisions. Only in Christ is there any real end to the biases of race, sex and culture. Only in Christ is there true "peace" because "**He Himself is our peace.**"

What is peace? Peace is oneness and it is embodied in a person. Look again at verse 14, "**He Himself is our peace who has made both one.**"

True peace is oneness. It is not merely the cessation of hostility, the absence of conflict; it means being one. Is it peace when you get two armies to lay down their weapons and stop fighting each other? Well, we call it that. And we certainly prefer that over armed conflict. But it is not really peace -- not according to God's definition. Is it peace when a husband and wife agree not to get a divorce but to stay together, maybe for the sake of the children, but that home continues in coldness and divisiveness, with no harmony or joy? Well, it may be peace according to man's definition, but it isn't according to God's. Is it peace when two friends who haven't spoken to each other for years finally decide to agree to disagree, to speak civilly to each other, but they don't seek each other's company any more? Not according to God's definition—there is no oneness.

You see, peace is oneness, harmony. It is sharing mutual enjoyment. It is being one. Anything else is superficial and temporary and highly unsatisfactory. If you merely agree not to fight, it is not peace. This is why what we call peace among nations never lasts -- because it isn't really peace. It isn't oneness at all. It is only a weariness with warfare, an agreement to stop it for awhile until we can all recuperate and rearm.

But here the apostle tells us the secret of peace. The secret of oneness is a Person: **"He Himself is our peace."** And when Christ Jesus makes peace -- between individuals or between nations -- that peace will be a satisfying, permanent, and genuine peace. It will be a real peace that will last.

In order to live at peace, you must have peace. The problem with most of us is that we want to start by clearing up only the results of conflict. God never starts there; He starts with the person. He says peace is a Person, and in order for you to live at peace with other people, you must be at peace with the Person of Christ. If you have His peace, then He can start solving the conflict around you. But you never can do it on any other basis. So the place to start, the basis of peace, is the settling of any problems between you and Jesus Christ. That is always the place to start.

Here is the main theme of the book of Ephesians, a mystery that God hid in ages past. He **"has made both one,"** Jews and Gentiles joined together in Christ. That's the mystery of the body, the church. How is this possible? Because Jesus has **"broken down the middle wall of separation."**

In Herod's temple in Jerusalem there was a Court of the Gentiles and a Court of the Jews. Separating these two courts was a wall, a barrier. It stood about three or four feet high and it completely surrounded the inner courts of the temple.

When the temple area was excavated in 1871 and again in 1934, two inscriptions were found from this time period. They read: *"No foreigner [Gentile] may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclose. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death."*

Paul was very familiar with this wall. In fact it was one reason for why Paul was in prison as he writes this letter to the Ephesians. In Acts 21 the Jews in Jerusalem falsely accused Paul of bringing gentiles into the temple, specifically an Ephesian gentile Christian named Trophimus. They accused Paul of defiling the holy place of the temple. This wall was a physical reminder of the barrier and hostility between Jews and Gentiles.

Paul says that now Jesus has broken down the wall that separated them. Actually the physical wall was not destroyed until A.D. 70, several years after this letter was written, when the temple itself was destroyed. But Paul says the hostility it represented was demolished in Jesus Christ. The wall was a symbol of all the barriers of the Old Testament law with its commandments and ordinances that divided Jew from Gentile. And so here is:

II. The Process of Peace: Ending the Law at the Cross (2:15-16).

Jesus "**abolished in His flesh the enmity**" that is in "**the law of commandments**" and which is "**contained in ordinances.**"

Don't misunderstand. Jesus didn't come to abolish God's laws and start over. On the contrary, He said in Mt.5:17, "**Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.**" Here's the difference. Jesus did not do away with God's *moral* law but He did abolish the *ceremonial* law that was "**contained in ordinances.**"

Jesus obliterated the hundreds of ceremonial laws of feasts, sacrifices, offerings and rules for cleansing and purification. Before Christ a Gentile could not worship together, they had to be separated. In Christ, they could now worship together and all ceremonial distinctions were "**abolished in His flesh.**" They were fulfilled in Him and were no longer needed.

The Jews despised the Gentiles because they considered themselves better than Gentiles. "We have the Law of Moses," they said. "The Law is right and true; it reflects the character of God. You Gentiles don't have the Law." And in their blindness and self-righteous hypocrisy, they thought they were keeping this Law because followed the outward, external requirements of the Law. And so they hated and despised the Gentiles. They thought they were superior. The Gentiles, on the other hand, hated the Jews, because they knew they lived in self-righteous hypocrisy. So there was intense hostility between them. Jesus' solution is to take away the Law. Remove that from the picture -- help them to see that the Law judges both alike -- and you'll end the hostility. Put them on the same level -- so they both need grace, both need forgiveness -- and you remove hostility. The law always brings hostility. Only grace brings peace.

This is what Paul says Jesus has done with the Law. He fulfilled the Law in Himself, and by doing so, He showed both Jew and Gentile to be sinners before God. He showed them how the Law was meant to be fulfilled. And when they saw his impeccable life, the Jews knew they were just as guilty as the Gentiles. This is what Paul argues at great length in Romans 2, 3, and 4 -- that the Jew does not have an advantage over the Gentile simply because he knows more truth. But Jew and Gentile both need to be forgiven. And so our Lord gave them a common ground of forgiveness, they both stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. And at the cross God removes the basis for our hostility.

Then what? Is that all? Is God content merely with ending hostility? Never. There is a second step: "**to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.**"

Because Jesus broke down "**the middle wall of separation,**" because he "**abolished**" the ceremonial laws, He could "**create in Himself one new man from the two.**"

Look closely at the word "**new.**" It comes from a *kainos*, it refers to "freshness" rather than new in time it is new in kind. It does not refer to something recently completed,

like a new car from an assembly line. It is stronger. The word means a new kind and quality, a completely new model!

The "one new man" Jesus creates is no longer a Jew or a Gentile. He is a new model unlike any before. He is a Christian. To be a Christian is to be part of this **"one new man."** "Man" refers to humanity.

Jesus didn't Christianize the Jews or Judaize the Gentiles. He didn't create a half-breed. He made an entirely "new man," a masterpiece (v.10). We, the people of God, the body of Christ are a new race, different from anyone else in the world.

This is an overriding theme of Ephesians (cf. 1:9-10, 22-23; 4:4-6). There may be African-Americans and Anglo-Americans, but there are no African-Christians or Anglo-Christians. Asian, European, African, Hispanic Christians. In Christ we are one!

1 Pet.2:9 speaks of all who belong to Christ when it says, **"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."**

John Oxenham has written: "In Christ there is no East or West, in Him no South nor North, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth."

Reconciliation with men is inseparable from reconciliation with God. This is why the world will never have it. As we come to God, we come to each other. Our common denominator is Christ.

Jesus died to **"reconcile... both,"** that is both Jews and Gentiles to God. Both Jews and Gentiles converge to make one new race at the foot of the cross. It was **"through the cross"** that Jesus could "put [ing] **to death the enmity**" alienation between men and God and men and men.

It is only through Jesus that we are reconciled to God. The paganism of the Gentiles could not bring them to God. The ritualism of the Jews could not save them. Jesus is "the Way" for ALL men.

In Acts 15:9, speaking of both Jews and Gentiles, Peter said, **"and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."**

This is what Paul is saying. We are to see each other as no different whatsoever, before God. If in one area of our life we think we don't need to be forgiven -- in that area we are utterly unacceptable to God. If there is an area where we think we have never done wrong, in that area we are totally unacceptable to God. The only ground we have to stand on before him is that of forgiveness, and **"not of works, lest any man should boast,"** (Ephesians 2:9 KJV). Therefore, everyone stands before God on the same level. When people see this, hostility is brought to an end. Nobody is pointing a finger, nobody is blaming the other, nobody is saying, "Well, if only you'd done this, then I could have done that." All such division and schism and hostility is brought to an end, and there is only the reception of the grace and the forgiveness of God. Hearts are healed, and hostility ends. This is what is brought out in the last

section -- the means of possessing peace. How do you do this? How do you actually lay hold of it?

III. The Means to Possess Peace: Jesus Preached Peace (2:17-18).

V.17 teaches us that it was for this reason that Jesus was born, to "**preach [ed] peace to those who were afar off** [Gentiles] **and to those who were near** [Jews -- nearer because of the covenant].

Preaching is never an argument, never a debate or dialogue. Preaching is simply the announcement of a fact. You can either accept it or reject it, but you can't quarrel with it. It is what God says is true. And this is what God says is true -- that the ground of self-righteousness has been removed, and a new relationship is possible. A new relationship will come into being which will be better and more beautiful, richer than anything you've known before. And God says he is satisfied with the arrangement, that he accepts you both on those terms.

In v.18 we see that it was "**through Him**" the Prince of Peace that "**we both**," both Jews and Gentiles have "**access**" the right to be in God's presence. We have "**one Spirit**." The same Holy Spirit indwells all who believe, both Jew and Gentile.

Tim Kimmel, in his book, *Little House on the Freeway*, writes about the Japanese occupation of Korea shortly after the turn of the century. The oppressors were ruthless. They overwhelmed the Koreans with a brutality that would sicken the strongest of stomachs. Christians were especially persecuted. Churches were boarded up and foreign missionaries ejected. One pastor persistently begged the Japanese police for permission to meet for services. Finally the police chief offered to unlock his church ... for one meeting. Korean families throughout a wide area came for the service.

Their voices of praise could not be concealed inside the little wooden frame sanctuary. Peasants nearby heard them sing "Nearer My God to Thee." As they sang, the Japanese police barricaded the doors, doused the church with kerosene and set it ablaze. Those who tried to escape through the windows were shot.

The pastor knew it was the end. He led his congregation in an old hymn. With smoke burning their eyes, they instantly joined as one to sing their hope and leave their legacy. *Alas and did my Savior bleed? And did my Sovereign die? Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?* Just before the roof collapsed they sang the last verse, their words an eternal testimony to their faith. *But drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe: Here, Lord, I give myself away 'tis all that I can do! At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light, And the burden of my heart rolled away -- It was there by faith I received my sight, And now I am happy all the day.*

Kimmel writes, "**The strains of music and wails of children were lost in a roar of flames. The elements that once formed bone and flesh mixed with the smoke and dissipated into the air. The bodies that once housed life fused with the charred rubble of a building that once housed a church. But the souls who left singing finished their chorus in the throne room of God.**"

For decades, Christians in Korea could not wipe away the memory of such evil persecution. They loathed all Japanese. A monument was built at the location of the fire. It stood as a mute reminder of their pain. In 1972, a group of Japanese pastors traveling through Korea came upon the memorial. When they read the details of the tragedy, they were overcome with shame. They returned to Japan and with an outpouring of love from their fellow believers, they raised ten million yen (\$25,000). With it, they built a beautiful white church building on the site of the tragedy. At the dedication service, the Japanese generosity was acknowledged, but the memories were still there. These Japanese were descendants of a ruthless enemy. Speeches were made, the details of the tragedy were recalled, and the names of the dead honored. At the close of the service, they began to sing "Nearer My God to Thee." As the voices mingled, memories of the past mixed with the truth of the song, and resistance started to melt. The song leader then sang "At the Cross." The Japanese believers began to weep. The Korean believers' bitterness was overcome by the love of the cross. Kimmel concludes **"They clung to each other and wept. Japanese tears of repentance and Korean tears of forgiveness intermingled to bathe the site of an old nightmare. Heaven had sent the gift of reconciliation to a little white church in Korea"** (pp.56-61).

This is the way God deals with us and our hostility. What separates us from each other is the law. When we insist others are wrong and we are right, it breeds hostility. But as soon as we give up our self-righteousness and admit that we are no better—we are all sinners in need of grace, and that there is no way of justifying ourselves before God in any area of our lives, other than being forgiven—then the hostility ends, and then God brings us into that glorious relationship of freedom and enjoyment of life with the Father and with each other.

Prayer:

Our holy Father, we thank you for the access we have to you, our loving heavenly Father, One who accepts us, who forgives us, who enjoys us, who glories in us, who is tenderly concerned about the most intimate details of our needs. And, Father, how foolish we've been, oftentimes, to stand in self-righteous judgment against others, to insist that we had areas of life in which we were clear before you, that we didn't need to be forgiven, that only "they" needed it. Father, forgive us for that. How like that unrighteous steward we have often been, when we have been forgiven so much, but have been unwilling to extend forgiveness to another. Awaken us, Lord, to the great debt we have before you. Help us to believe the message of peace which has been preached, to understand the announcement of the Holy Spirit to our hearts, and thus to enter into the joy of life with you. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.