

God's Plan of Reconciliation

Christ Our Peace

Ephesians 2:13-18

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June 4, 2017

Christ Our Peace

Scripture

We are currently in a series of sermons on Ephesians 2 that I am calling, “God’s Plan of Reconciliation.”

Ephesians 2 has two main sections. The first is verses 1-10, and the second is verses 11-22. Each section addresses our past, our present, and our future. Regarding our past, the Apostle Paul taught that all people were alienated from God and from one another. Then, he set down our present in which he described our reconciliation with God and with one another. That is what we shall examine today.

Let’s read about our reconciliation in Ephesians 2:13-18:

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (Ephesians 2:13-18)

Introduction

Several years ago, Ravi Zacharias described a meeting he had with one of the founders of Hamas (a Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement). Zacharias wrote:

Do you know why the Middle East is in the cauldron of hate? Because it's living with the logic of unforgiveness. I was talking to one of the founders of Hamas, Sheikh Talal. I was part of a group of people who had gone to the Middle East to try and bring the people together to a peace table. Sheikh Talal gave us a great meal, told us of eighteen years he'd served in prison, and how some of his children had been lost in suicide bombings. When my turn came to ask a question, I said, "Sheik, forgive me if I'm asking you the wrong question. Please tell me, what do you think of suicide bombing and sending your children out like that?"

After he finished his answer, I said, "Sheik, you and I may never see each other again, so I want you to hear me. A little distance from here is a mountain upon which Abraham went 5,000 years ago to offer his son. And as the axe was about to fall, God said, 'Stop.'" I said, "Do you know what God said after that?" He shook his head. I said, "God said, 'I myself will provide.'" He nodded his head. I said, "Very close to where you and I are sitting, Sheik, is a hill. Two thousand years ago, God kept that promise and brought his own Son and the axe did not stop this time. He sacrificed his own Son."

He just stared at me. The room was full of smoke with all of his security people. I said, "I may never see you again, Sheikh, but I want to leave this with you: Until you and I receive the Son that God has provided, we will be offering our own sons and daughters on the battlefields of this world for land and power and pride."

I could just see the man's lips beginning to quiver; he was sitting right next to me. Nobody said anything after that.... As we were walking out...Sheikh Talal went quickly and shook hands with everyone, and then he came over to me and grabbed me by the shoulders, kissed me on both sides of the face, patted my face, and he said, "You're a good man, I hope I see you again someday."

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When you understand [Christ's grace], it is an unparalleled message. In Hinduism, you pay with karma. In Islam, you never know if your good deeds will outweigh your bad deeds. But the grace of Christ comes to you and says, "If any man comes unto me I will in no wise cast him out."¹

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians about God's plan of reconciliation. He had just explained their former alienation from God and one another in verses 11-12. Then, as in Ephesians 2:4, he introduced another great "but" statement in Ephesians 2:13, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near...." How? "...by the blood of Christ." That is, the Gentiles were "far off" from God spiritually. They had no relationship with him at all. But, by the blood of Christ, they have been "brought near," that is, they have been spiritually reconciled to God.

Lesson

Ephesians 2:14-18 gives us a description of the reconciling work of Christ.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Christ Has Brought Us Peace (2:14a)
2. Christ Has Made Us One (2:14b-17)
3. Christ Has Given Us Access to God (2:18)

I. Christ Has Brought Us Peace (2:14a).

First, Christ has brought us peace.

Paul said in verse 14a, **"For he himself is our peace."**

¹ Adapted from Ravi Zacharias, "Ravi Zacharias Speaks with the Founder of Hamas," Justin Taylor *Between Two Worlds* blog (12-3-12) in <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2013/february/1022513.html>.

Jesus is the peacemaker.

Paul had just stated in verse 12 that the Gentiles were formerly “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.” They had no spiritual relationship with God. And they certainly had no spiritual relationship with the people of God. But God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, and by his life and death, he facilitated peace.

Sin is the cause of all our trouble in the world. We were all born in sin, we all live in sin, and we all struggle with sin in our daily lives. Sin is the cause of all conflict and division. Sin is the enemy of peace and harmony. Sin is basically rebellion against God. It is living for self. Sin is gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. James, the brother of our Lord, asked, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” And then he answered, “Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:1-3).

Peace comes when a person surrenders to the sovereign Lordship of Christ. Peace comes when self dies, and the only place that self dies is at the foot of the cross of Calvary. The Apostle Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

John MacArthur tells the story of a group of American soldiers during World War II. They were exchanging fire with some Germans who occupied a farm house. The family who lived in the house had run to the barn for protection. Suddenly

their little three-year-old daughter became frightened and ran out into the field between the two groups of soldiers. When they saw the little girl, both sides immediately ceased firing until she was safe. A little child brought peace, brief as it was, as almost nothing else could have done.²

Jesus Christ came to this earth as a baby born in Bethlehem. The angels announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds and said in Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace* among those with whom he is pleased!" Jesus brought peace by his death on the cross. His death provides the only solution to the problem of sin and alienation. His death brought peace to all who put their trust in him.

II. Christ Has Made Us One (2:14b-17)

Second, Christ has made us one.

Paul said in verse 14b that it is Christ **"who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility."** In last week's message, I mentioned that the alienation between the Jews and the Gentiles was visibly seen in the temple precincts in Jerusalem. John Stott described the temple building itself as constructed on an elevated platform. Round it was the Court of the Priests. East of this was the Court of Israel, and further east the Court of the Women. These three courts – for the priests, the lay men and the lay women of Israel respectively – were all on the same elevation as the temple itself. From this level one descended five steps to a walled platform, and then on the other side of the wall fourteen more steps to another wall, beyond which was the outer court or Court of the Gentiles. This was a spacious court

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 76.

running right round the temple and its inner courts. From any part of it the Gentiles could look up and view the temple, but were not allowed to approach it. They were cut off from it by the surrounding wall, which was a four-and-a-half-foot stone barricade, and which Paul referred to as **“the dividing wall of hostility”** (2:14). On this wall were displayed at intervals warning notices in Greek and Latin. They read, in effect, not “Trespassers will be prosecuted” but “Trespassers will be executed.”³

The temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, but it was spiritually destroyed in 30 AD when Jesus died on the cross for sinners. He has **“broken down in his flesh”** the alienation that existed between Jews and Gentiles.

Specifically, Christ’s death on the cross broke down the dividing wall of hostility **“by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances”** (2:15a). This is a reference to the ceremonial law. The parallel passages in Colossians 2:11 and 2:16-21 alludes to circumcision, questions about food and drink, and regulations about festivals, new moon, and the Sabbath. All these commandments served to make a distinction between the people of God and the Gentiles. They were a huge barrier. But, by his death on the cross, Christ abolished the ceremonial law by fulfilling in himself all the shadows and types to which it pointed.

The purpose of Christ’s death on the cross was so **“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”** (2:15b-16). John Stott summarized what Paul was saying in these verses. He wrote:

³ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 91-92.

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This, then, was the achievement of Christ's cross. First, he abolished the law (its ceremonial regulations and moral condemnation) as a divisive instrument separating men from God and Jews from Gentiles. Secondly, he created a single new humanity out of its two former deep divisions, making peace between them. Thirdly, he reconciled this new united humanity to God, having killed through the cross all the hostility between us. Christ crucified has thus brought into being nothing less than a new, united human race, united in itself and united to its creator.⁴

We should not miss the profound teaching of Paul. Paul was saying that once there were Jews and Gentiles. But now God had created **one new man in place of the two**. John Stott calls this a "single new humanity." He describes it as follows:

Now [Paul] writes of another citizenship. Although he does not develop the metaphor, he appears to be alluding to citizenship of God's kingdom. The kingdom of God is neither a territorial jurisdiction nor even a spiritual structure. God's kingdom is God himself ruling his people, and bestowing upon them all the privileges and responsibilities which his rule implies. To this new international God-ruled community, which had replaced the Old Testament national theocracy, Gentiles and Jews belonged on equal terms.⁵

Christ has made us one with God and with one another. And he has done so by reconciling us both to God. Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones provides a wonderful summary of what the powerful word "**reconcile**" means. It has five parts:

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 102.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 105.

It means *first* of all a change from a hostile to a friendly relationship. That is the simplest meaning, the basic meaning....

In the *second* place, it does not merely mean a friendship after estrangement, a mere doing away with the estrangement. It is not merely that it brings people into speaking terms again who formerly passed one another without even looking at each other. It means more; it means really bringing together again, a reuniting, a re-connecting. It carries that meaning.

In the *third* place, it is a word also that emphasizes the completeness of the action. It means that the enmity is so completely laid aside that complete amity follows. And the emphasis here is on the completeness of the action. It is not the patching up of a disagreement. It is not a compromise, the kind of thing that happens so often when a conference has gone on for days and there has been a deadlock and somebody suddenly gets a bright idea and suggests introducing a particular word or formula, which just patches up the problem for the moment. It is not that. It is a complete action, it produces complete amity and concord where there was formerly hostility.

But in the *fourth* place, it also means this. It is not merely that the two partners to the trouble or the dispute or the quarrel have decided to come together. This word that the apostle uses implies that it is *one* of the parties that takes the action, and it is the *upper* one that does it. A part of this word indicates an action from above. It is the Greek word "*kata*" It is not that the two sides come together as it were voluntarily; it is the one bringing the other into this position of complete amity and concord.

And finally, in the *fifth* place, the word carries the meaning that it is a restoration of something that was there before. Now our word "reconcile," which is really a transliteration of the Latin word, in and of itself suggests that. Re-concile! They were conciled before, they are now re-conciled, brought back

to where they were.⁶

Paul also said that part of Christ's work of making us one is that **"he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near"** (2:17). When Christ was on earth he proclaimed the good news of reconciliation with God and one another to both Jew and Gentile.

III. Christ Has Given Us Access to God (2:18)

And third, Christ has given us access to God.

All who respond to Christ in faith and repentance have access to the Father through the Spirit. Notice the Trinitarian action in verse 18: **"For through him [Christ] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."**

Tony Merida tells the story of Charles Simeon's conversion. Simeon eventually became the pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge for more than 50 years. His mother died when he was young. His father was an unbeliever. His boarding school was a godless and corrupt place. And he knew of no Christian at Cambridge for almost three years after his conversion! His acceptance of Christ was a miracle of grace. He was 19 years old, sitting in his dormitory room as Passion Week began at the end of March 1779. He wrote:

But in Passion Week, as I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper, I met with an expression to this effect – "That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering." The thought came into my mind, What, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an Offering for me, that I may lay my sins on

⁶ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 224-225.

His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer. Accordingly, I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus; and on the Wednesday, began to have a hope of mercy; on the Thursday that hope increased; on the Friday and Saturday it became more strong; and on the Sunday morning, Easter-day, April 4, I awoke early with those words upon my heart and lips, “Jesus Christ is risen to-day! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” From that hour peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul; and at the Lord’s Table in our Chapel I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Savior.⁷

If we have trusted in Christ, then we too have sweet access to God!

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the topic of reconciliation in Ephesians 2:13-18, let us thank God for our access to him.

What does this mean for us? Christ has not only enabled our access to God, but he has also made us one with every other believer – whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free – regardless of any distinction. Therefore, let us act like Christians who have been reconciled to God, and who have also been reconciled to one another. Let us love and serve one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.

⁷ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), n.p.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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