

## **Lesson One - Shalom, Unity To All**

Text: Ephesians 1:1-10

**Ephesians 1:1-2** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Peace/Shalom**

When we hear the word “peace” in the Bible, it is easy to miss the rich depth that it carries. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *shalom*, which is usually translated simply as peace, in many ways captures the vision and will of God for all creation. Commonly used by Jews in greetings, such as “shalom” or “peace be with you,” *shalom* carries the idea of wholeness, wellness, and blessing. It envisions a world where all things are made right and exist in harmony with one another. The prophet Isaiah captures this vision in Isaiah 11:6-9:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.  
<sup>7</sup> The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.  
<sup>8</sup> The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.  
<sup>9</sup> They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Israel is called by God to live towards such a vision of *shalom*. They are called to live practicing goodness and justice in the world. The psalmist gives instructions for doing so in Psalm 34:14, “Turn from evil and do good; seek peace (*shalom*) and pursue it.”

Walther Brueggemann describes *shalom* saying, “...it bears tremendous freight—the freight of a dream of God that resists all our tendencies to division, hostility, fear, drivenness, and misery. Shalom is the substance of the biblical vision of one community embracing all of creation.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Peace in Ephesians**

The letter to the Ephesians is written with this vision in mind. No writing in the New Testament has more to say about God's peace than Ephesians. It emphatically declares that Christ is our peace, the living *shalom* of God.

Peace in the letter of Ephesians – 1:2; 2:14; 2:17; 4:3; 6:15; 6:23

- 1:2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2:14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,
- 2:17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.
- 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
- 6:15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom*, 16.

- 6:23 Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Shalom, Unity to All in Christ**

**Ephesians 1:7-10** <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup>that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup>he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup>to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

The vision of God's *shalom* is now being made a reality in Jesus Christ. His blood has been shed for all. All who have come to believe by faith in his name have been freed from sin and are no longer bound by the powers that once divided us. God's grace has revealed to us the goodness of God's will and purpose to make all things right and heal our relationships with one another. We are being made one, one new people, one new identity, united together in Christ. This is the wonder of living in Christ, becoming one family in the church. God is teaching us to seek the good of one another, to seek *shalom* in a world that is hostile, broken, and fractured.

### **Facing the Divide**

In the life of the early church, few divides were greater than the ethnic, social, and religious divides of Jews and Gentiles. Only divine intervention could bring such opposing groups into unity, one body, the church. This is the amazing power of Christ's Spirit in the church. Consider the way Paul stresses this in both Colossians and Galatians.

**Colossians 3:11** Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

**Galatians 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Stott describes, "Not that the facts of human differentiation are removed. Men remain men and women remain women, Jews remain Jews and Gentiles Gentiles. But inequality before God is abolished. There is a new unity in Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Today, we face similar challenges in learning how to overcome the schisms that create division, hostility, and fear. It requires that we confront the things within us that cause us to hate, rather than love others.

### **Discussion:**

Take some time to discuss and identify some of the divisions, hostilities, and fears that plague our world today (Be patient, don't rush through the questions. It may help to have your class pair up and share with one another and then share with the whole group.):

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<sup>2</sup> Stott, John R. *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 101-102.

## *Practicing the Peace of Christ*

- 1) What are the things that divide people today?<sup>3</sup>
- 2) What are things we share in common?<sup>4</sup>
- 3) How do we cultivate peace and unity (*shalom*)?

### **Practicing the Peace of Christ**

Aware of the divisiveness of our culture, the message of Ephesians offers a timely word and challenge to the church. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the catalyst of the reconciling power of God embodied and practiced by the new humanity, the body of Christ. Paul calls the gospel of Jesus Christ the “gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15). It is only through Christ that the ruptures of our humanity can be healed and made whole. The church is called to be the place where this peacemaking comes alive in us. “It occurs when Christians bring forgiveness, healing, and justice into situations marked by alienation and brokenness.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Looking Ahead**

Each week we will explore how we are to share in Christ’s vision of peace and unity for humanity by the power of the cross. Weeks 2-4 focus on our new identity in Christ, who is “our peace” (2:14). Weeks 5-8 seek to guide us in the ways that we are to embody the gospel of peace in our relationships with one another.

- **September 3 - Lesson 2 Christ, Our Peace** - Ephesians 2:11-22
- **September 10 - Lesson 3 Peace, Love, and Prayer** - Ephesians 3:14-21
- **September 17 - Lesson 4 One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism** - Ephesians 4:1-16
- **September 24 - Lesson 5 Peace and the Power of Words** - Ephesians 4:17-32
- **October 1 - Lesson 6 Peace within Marriages** - Ephesians 5:21-32
- **October 8 - Lesson 7 Peace within Families** - Ephesians 6:1-4
- **October 15 - Lesson 8 Peace as Our New Status of Being** - Ephesians 6:5-12

### **Prayer**

Our prayer is that this study would encourage our church family in taking up the ministry of peace and reconciliation that Jesus has called us to. It requires that we confess the sins of strife and war that are common in our society that daily tears one another down. We must reject divisiveness and partisanship and actively seek the unity of Christ. We must learn the language and life of peace, prayerfully seeking to build others up in the grace and mercy of Jesus. Please be in prayer for your class, praying for the peace of Christ to be awakened in the relationships of each member. Let the prayer of Ephesians 3:14-21 be the prayer to guide our Hillcrest family towards Christ’s vision of peace.

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<sup>3</sup> Stott laments, “For even in the church there is often alienation, disunity and discord. And Christians erect new barriers in place of the old which Christ has demolished...now racism, nationalism or tribalism, now personal animosities engendered by pride, prejudice, jealousy and the unforgiving spirit, now a divisive system of caste or class...and now a denominationalism which turns churches into sects and contradicts the unity and universality of Christ’s church” (Stott, 110-111).

<sup>4</sup> Numerous examples from Scripture: being made in the image of God, human sinfulness, Christ’s grace for all, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew D. Kim and Paul A. Hoffman. *Preaching to a Divided Nation*, 21.