

Lesson Two – Christ Our Peace

Text: Ephesians 2:11-22

Centering the Vision of Peace - Breaking Down the Dividing Wall of Hostility

Ephesians 2:14-17 ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

The Gospel of Peace and Reconciliation

Peace between Gentiles and Jews begins with a right understanding of the Gospel. A right understanding of our utter dependance upon Christ for life and salvation. The “Therefore” at the beginning of the text links this section with the previous which lays out that foundation. That it is not our actions, good or bad, that save us, on our own we are utterly hopeless, rather it is in Christ that we are reconciled to God and thus have the possibility of reconciliation with others. This is essential for both Jews and Gentiles. There is no superiority or inferiority between the Jewish people and the Gentile. They are both utterly dependent upon God’s grace. The religious observance of the Jew does not make them superior. The money and power of the Gentile does not make them more worthy or valuable in the Kingdom. Both are on a level playing field—and thus have a basis for connection and the building of relationship.

Discussion Questions

- This conflict is not between “Atheist and Believers” but between people who both claim to be rightly worshipping the God of Israel. Circumcision is no longer a live debate amongst the people of God. What are some of the central debates between Christians here in Abilene Texas? (Note: We are not trying to resolve the debates here merely identify the debates that shape OUR community.)
- This was also an ethnic conflict—between ethnic Jews and ethnic Greeks. Are there ethnic conflicts that impact our church?
- Paul suggests that our dependence on Christ is the basis by which we find unity amongst hostile groups. Ethnic or Religious. How would an acknowledgment of our dependence upon grace aid us in finding reconciliation between brothers and sisters in both religious and ethnic conflict?

Peace Far and Near

A supernatural event that overcomes our divides is occurring in the church, the body of Christ. Everett Ferguson explains:

“The church is one people because it is filled with the Holy Spirit of God. The Spirit affects a reconciliation of those divided. "For through Christ both of us [Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father... In Christ you also are built together in the Spirit into a dwelling place for God" (Eph. 2:18, 22). No differences in the modern world are greater than the cultural and religious differences between Jews and Gentiles in antiquity, but the Spirit creates unity but the Spirit creates unity out of differences” (Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*, 402).

Practicing the Peace of Christ

The worldview and common practices of a Jew and the worldview and common practices of a gentile are utterly different. Here are a few examples:

Concept of God/Gods	Monotheistic: One all-powerful, all-knowing, omnipresent God, All Good	Polytheistic: Local deities non-omniscient not omnipresent “gods” inferior to “The Fates” thus, ironclad fatalism. Pantheon of gods and goddesses living on Mount Olympus. Morally corrupt
Sacred Texts	Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) consisting of Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim.	No "bible," but works like Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey" and Hesiod's "Theogony" are central.
Philosophy and Worldview	Emphasis on covenant, commandments, prophetic tradition. Morality rooted in divine command.	Emphasis on personal excellence, reason, aesthetics. Philosophical explorations separate from divine command. The gods are immoral.
Cultural and Social Values	Focus on community, family, adherence to religious commandments (mitzvot).	Individual achievement, personal beauty, athleticism, intellectualism, importance of city-states (polis) and patriotic duty.
Spread and Influence	More insular historically, preserving traditions within the community. Not aggressively seeking converts.	Spread through conquests and assimilation, influencing many regions of the Mediterranean and Near East.
Human Life	Humans are made in the image of God worthy of dignity, value, and respect regardless of gender or ability	Beauty and aesthetics are emphasized deformed children, as well as many female children were often left outside the city to die or be taken by slavers. The strong and beautiful were prized

Sexuality	Sex is a covenant act reserved between married persons. Sex is a good gift given by God, in its limits, for the enjoyment of his creation and propagation of the next generation. Adultery was forbidden.	Pre-marital sex was common, especially for men. - Men often had relationships outside of marriage, including with slaves and prostitutes. However, a married woman engaging in extramarital affairs was generally condemned.
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For Gentiles, coming to Christ meant the unlearning of an entire worldview, and a reimagining of just about everything in one's life. This process likely took time and the old patterns likely surfaced from time to time. From what we read in the New Testament, it was hard for many Jews to accept the Gentiles as brothers and sisters.

Discussion Questions:

- The gospel was spread to those with radically different worldviews than the biblical worldview. Why do you think this was effective in the 1st century?
- In western democratic countries Christianity is, statistically, on the decline. Why are we struggling to evangelize where our 1st century brothers and sisters had so much success?

This reconciliation finds its culmination in verses 19-22 where Paul makes the claim that the community of Jews and Gentiles sanctified by the blood of Jesus IS the new temple of God. The old temple (which still stood while Paul wrote this letter) was an exercise in exclusion. Gentiles could not cross a certain line, Jewish women could not cross a certain line, Jewish men could not cross a certain line, only the High Priest once a year could cross a certain line. Paul makes the radical claim that the presence of God is found where the blood of Jesus has broken down “walls of hostility” and in its place built a temple of the Holy Spirit. This requires sacrifice from all parties involved. The Jewish Christians must lay down their feelings of cultural and ethnic superiority. While the gentiles must submit their pagan worldview to that of a biblical one. Both parties become outcasts to many in their communities—finding strength instead in the new family of God.

Discussion Questions

- How is peace made, practically speaking, between groups from radically different backgrounds?
- How do we determine if something is an insignificant cultural detail versus a practice that is unbiblical that must be addressed? (Think different views on time/punctuality vs. differing views on the resurrection etc.).
- What are the challenges of forming a new family between groups that are quite different and possibly (formerly) hostile?

Praying God's Peace in Us:

Close with Paul's prayer from Ephesians 3:14-21.