

United in Christ: Reconciled Together
Ephesians 2v14-18

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one...”

Introduction: God’s church has always thrived when the world is set against it. Suffering brings greater dependence, persecution greater clarity, and opposition greater focus. This is counter intuitive to the longing of our heart for comfort and the desire to keep the status quo, but Scripture and history are replete with the evidence of fruitfulness of the gospel and health of the church emerging out of harsh circumstances rather than ease. This is my hope for Grace Simi, as we continue to face changes in our culture AWAY from God and His Word and toward humanistic rebellion AGAINST God and His design. Today, many pastor friends are preaching about God’s design for sex and sexual identity, standing with faithful brothers up in Canada. A bill was just passed, Bill C-4, through the House and Senate without opposition in Canada, that will make it illegal to promote or encourage someone who is in bondage of homosexuality or transgenderism to turn to Christ, repent, and embrace God’s design of heterosexuality and being created by God as male and female. The Bill is intentionally broad, meaning a pastor, counselor, elder, or anyone encouraging this will be liable to 2 years in prison, and if someone actually takes the counsel and actively changes, will be liable for 5 years in prison. Not only will this effect the church in Canada, but we also know decisions like this tend to trickle down to the U.S. In other words, it will be illegal to give the most loving, life giving, glorious, joyful message of freedom from sin in Christ, who will wipe away all guilt and shame and give His righteousness to all who believe. **Opposition is in the room; persecution is knocking on the door.**

Does this instill us with fear? I’m not sure we’re clicking our heals, but we are full of confidence. The church at Ephesus, which we’ve been studying, was used by God in the midst of a city full of idols, witchcraft, magicians, and every other sort of thing to blind people was used by God so that **all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks** (Acts 19:10), and proclaimed that Jesus is Lord (19:17), while persuading many to turn away from their gods since they were simply made with human hands (19:26). What made them so effective? It was a direct result being **united in message and mission, a commitment to knowing and living out Biblical truth, and demonstrating that to the world around.** The early church faced many potential divisions: Rich and poor learning to love each other beyond cultural status, slave/master learning to submit to each other in the church when that was not the same outside, men and women learning to see each other as equal but different, and Greeks learning to love non-Greeks, which they would have considered Barbarians before Christ. Many walls could have been built, but the gospel tears down these barriers. Last week we started to look at the **most major** one they faced: Jews and Gentiles becoming one in Christ Jesus. The gospel is the solution to division, explaining how we overcome deep seated differences, and move toward each other in love.

Unity is imperative. Jesus prayed for it (John 17:20-21), that we’d be one like He is One with the Father. If He prays for it, He not only values it, but will also make it happen. That is the crux of this section, how His blood shed on the cross not only reconciles us to God, but to each other, and sets up something completely new in the church.

The Plight of the Past (12)

“Remember, that you were at that time 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.

Last week we began to look at the tension between Jews and Gentiles, in the world at that time and even in the church. There were Jews who believed that the external signs and ceremonies given to them by God to be distinct so they could point people to Him were now measuring sticks of righteousness. They viewed anyone who was *uncircumcised* as an outsider, a lesser participant, and that anyone coming to Christ would FIRST have to become a Jew. Paul framed this reality not in terms of good/bad, but in **remembrance**, calling believers in the church to REMEMBER where they came from. Remembering the past helps us embrace the reality of our present and hope for the future. Not only were Jews and Gentiles separated socially, they were separated spiritually, which is where verse 12 picks up.

Again, Paul reminds the Gentiles in the church about their past, but new in a corporate way, not merely an individual look. The look is not only before they individually heard the gospel and repented through belief, but how the whole system worked. There were **5 areas of separation or hopelessness before Christ**.

- 1) **Separated from Christ** – There was no messianic hope for non-Jews, since all supposed messiahs have always required something FROM people, that they had to climb a ladder of morality to GET to God, instead of a Messiah who comes TO us.
- 2) **Alienated from the citizenship of Israel** – God chose Israel as its conduit (Deut. 7:6-11) through whom He showed His glory. A person would have to join the nation to enjoy citizenship, becoming a proselyte but never a full member
- 3) **Strangers to the covenants of Promise** – Though Gentiles were recipients of the results of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-6), it was not given directly to them, just as the Davidic (2 Sam 7) and New Covenants (Jer. 31:31-34). These were given directly to Israel and enjoyed directly by them
- 4) **Without hope** – There is no article in front of the word “hope” here, which means that Gentiles were not only without THE hope of salvation in Christ, but were characterized by hopelessness, or the quality of hopelessness. Hope is only as good as the object that one hopes in. We can put our hope in horses and chariots, in governments or portfolios, but when it comes to the future, those bound by this world have no bankable assets of assurance in the future
- 5) **Without God** – Not in an atheistic way, but an ignorant way. Though they knew God through His attributes and nature itself, they still refused to worship Him but became futile in their thinking and darkened by their foolish hearts (Rom. 1:21).

Quite a list. Now, we have to understand WHY Paul gave this list, since it was not simply to beat up and beat down his Gentile brothers and sisters. What was Paul trying to get them to remember? How was that remembrance helpful? Let me give you a few:

- **Appreciation in the Present** – If Gentiles would understand that they came from such a hopeless start, that they had none of the advantages that the Jews had, they should grow in appreciation of God’s sovereign choice and work of salvation. This enhances our ability to worship and thankfulness for the gospel in our own lives. Each day we live and each time we gather to worship, we should remember who we truly are: wretched sinners saved by grace alone, by faith alone, through Christ alone, so we can glorify God alone.
- **Humility toward God, grace toward others** – The Gentiles, who made up a majority, could easily forget their history and begin to look down or arrogantly toward their Jewish brothers (or anyone for that matter). Subtly, we can begin to think that the gifts we have are somehow earned or deserved over time, and forget where others start from. I’ve thought about this in terms of remembering that many do not have the blessing of growing up with faithful fathers, or intact families, or a model of Christian values, so they often act out of ignorance or reaction to it. That does not mean I’m ashamed of the advantage, but it reminds me it’s GRACE, not about me, and thus grace much be extended to others lavishly.
- **Perspective** – What we will see is that all of the areas in which we Gentiles were shut out of have now been given to us in Christ and His church. We had no hope, no belonging, no mission, but in the church, we are new citizens, part of a new family, and a new Temple (Eph. 2:19-22).

We are so prone to forget, so we must proactively REMEMBER these things. Which is what Paul explains next....

The Power of Redemption (13)

But NOW, in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

There are certain phrases in Scripture that pack power per capital, that change everything in a few words. We had one of these in Ephesians 2:4 in “**But God...**”, that God broke through our hopelessness, rebellion, disobedience, and destiny of wrath with a flood of love, mercy, grace, and kindness. These simple words are what we remember in the bleakest of circumstances or when we are praying for the most stubborn heart. “But God” changes everything, including our wretched state.

Here we have another power packed promise: “**But now, in Christ Jesus...**”. How is it possible to be reconciled to those who were once far off, who were separate, when it seems hopeless? “But now, in Christ Jesus.” It is **imperative that we see that everything that comes in the next verses is sourced in these words: In Christ Jesus.** Outside of Jesus Christ, we can only offer window dressing and good efforts, but cannot experience or offer real change.

Paul picks up this idea of “those near” and “those far away”. In a geographical sense, he was referring to those who were near the Temple and the center of God’s kingdom, and those who were far away, meaning the Gentiles. But his point was more about a **spiritual reality**, since the solution was not a geographical change but one of the heart. Paul was most likely referring to **Isaiah 57:9** which says:

“Peace, peace, to the far and to the near”, says the LORD, and I will heal him.”

How are both, who are at odds with God, made to be peaceful with Him? The payment price for the blood of Jesus Christ. Christ’s blood satisfied the wrath of God, and was the cost to offer us redemption (Rom. 3:25), and allowed God to make peace with us (Col. 1:20). This is offered to every person who would believe, that we can have forgiveness of every sin, that they can be paid for, and that we can be brought near to God, when we were once separated from Him. Everyone, Jew and Gentile, comes to God in Christ THE SAME EXACT WAY, through Christ alone. The next verses illustrate or explain the implications of this between Jews and Gentile, and gives a template for unity in the midst of all division.

The Picture of Being One in Christ (14-18)

Let’s look over the next five verses quickly, looking for the recurring theme and outline. Notice that the repeated word in 5 verses is “ONE”, “both one” in verse. 14, “one new man” in v. 15, “one body” in v. 16, and “one Spirit” in v. 18. This will culminate in what we’ll look at next week with how the church reflects this oneness, how it something radically different than the world has ever seen or can replicate.

1. Made Us Both One (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*

Walls are used for two primary reasons: keep people out, or keep people in. In Bangui, C.A.R, walls were built around homes and our missions center to keep people out. In Berlin it was used to keep people in for nearly 30 years. In some of your homes walls/fences are to keep toddlers from running around the house so you can get some things done. But whatever the purpose, **walls are designed to divide, often because there is hostility on the other side.** For the Jews and Gentiles, the hostility had to do with both social issues caused by the APPLICATION of the Law (like circumcision and dietary practices) and the Law itself, which kept Gentiles far off from the nation.

There are two huge principles to see here:

- 1) The emphasis on this verse is on “He Himself” is our peace, that unity is sourced in Christ alone. This is so important to remember as we observe the desire for ethnic unity that has been fractured in our culture and churches. There is no law, policy, or pay-back that can gain unity. Any partiality that has been shown and sinfully carried out cannot

be fixed or changed by turning it around, but peace can only be found IN the person, work, and blood of Jesus.

- 2) He did this by breaking down the wall in His flesh, by abolishing the Law of commandments. What does that mean? The law is good if it is used lawfully (1 Tim. 1:8). The Law was a tutor, a guardian, or custodian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24). In other words, when Christ came and died, the Law was fulfilled and is no longer operative for Jews OR Gentiles. Of course, the moral parts of the Law are still valuable and true, those that are reiterated in the New Testament. But in Himself, He took away the need to fulfill all of the ceremonies, practices, and observances of the law, tearing down what was keeping such hostility between Jew and Gentile and replacing it with peace.

2. Created One New Man (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*

What Jesus created in His body was something new. Gentiles did not have to become proselytes to Judaism to join the church or follow Christ, and Jews did not have to undo who they were to become Gentiles, since what Jesus created was something fundamentally new, not simply something of similar kind. In the church, in Christ, we KEEP distinctiveness in the sense that a Jew will still be Jewish by heritage, but not in Judaism. A woman will not stop being a woman, but will have a whole new identity in Christ. A slave would still be a slave in life but be free in Christ in the church. We do not LOSE our ethnic diversity but we GAIN a unity that supersedes ANY other diversity. The implications of this get worked out in chapters 4-6, but for now, let me try to illustrate how this works, and we have to look no further than what God has already established in **marriage**.

Marriage is a mystery. Two people, a man and woman, as completely different as could be created, come together as ONE flesh, leaving father and mother to create something new. Ephesians 5:32, in referring to this says, *“This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”* This means that one purpose of marriage is to illustrate the ONENESS that we have in Christ in the church. In marriage, a man and woman come together and keep their distinctive qualities (they don’t STOP being a man and woman), have certain responsibilities, but they lose the identity of singleness they once had. They are now ONE, fused together as a fundamentally new entity, a new family. This is why the church is the ONLY place that divisions can truly cease, walls can be broken down, and unity can be enjoyed. We celebrate our differences, because when we all function the way God has created us, we are healthy and effective. Yet, we are all ONE family, something new, with a new identity together. The church is where it is at, where the divided can find a home.

3. Reconciled in One Body (16)

*And might reconcile us both to God in **one body** through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*

Typically, the argument Paul makes goes from position to practice, from who we are in Christ to how that affects our relationships and actions outside. But here, he began with reconciled relationships on a human level, and moves to the reconciliation that happens between man and God. Now, he had already covered this in part in verses 1-10, but the point is still made. What ultimately unifies us together? What gets us into and keeps us unified despite our differences? The fact that everyone, Jew and Gentile, man and woman, slave and free, Greek and Barbarian, rich and poor, those of European, African, Asian, South American, Australian, or Canadian decent, are reconciled the **exact same way: through Jesus's work on the cross, by His blood.** This levels us. This unifies us because we are at peace with God through forgiveness. This means there is no hierarchy, no advantage or disadvantage, and no reason to boast other than Christ alone.

4. **Given Access in One Spirit** (17-18)

*And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.
For through Him we both have access in **One Spirit** to the Father.*

The glorious reality is that Jesus came to save the lost, both Jew and Gentile. This means that not ALL Gentiles or Jews are reconciled, but those that believe by faith, trust in the work of Christ, ask for forgiveness, and follow Him. The Holy Spirit indwells all who are born again, and we have the privilege of being in the presence of God the Father. This is where our PRACTICE must match our POSITION, the fact that all believers have the same Father, Savior, Spirit, access, forgiveness, salvation, and peace.

So let me ask some diagnostic questions to close:

- 1) Do we reflect this unity together here at Grace? Do we allow diversity to divide us or do we celebrate what God has brought together?
- 2) Are we looking for something OUTSIDE of the gospel for unity? Are we banking on laws, policy, or pressure to change people, or Christ's work alone?
- 3) Are we displaying to the world around us the sweet reality of unity in a way that cannot be explained other than Christ? Are we reconciling together when there is sin, misunderstanding, or any division? Do we pursue relationships together across normal lines of affinity?
- 4) Do we remember who we were so we can celebrate who we are?