**Christ Is Our Peace, Part 4**

**Ephesians 2:17**

**September 13, 2020**

1. Introduction
   1. We return this morning to Ephesians 2, now focusing on vv. 17-18 this morning.
      1. This section, which began at v. 11, asserts that Christ Himself is our peace.
      2. If you remember, the section began by noting the separation of these Gentiles from the Jews, and how these two groups were at odds with one another.
      3. But we saw in v. 13 that through the blood of Christ, the Gentiles were brought near to God, no longer strangers to the covenants and promises, but now God’s people in Christ.
      4. Christ Himself, then, is our peace, the peace between both Jews and Gentiles.
      5. However, as Paul begins to unfold for us how exactly Christ is our peace, he shows us something extraordinary: the division between Jews and Gentiles was not because of a social problem but because of a spiritual problem.
         1. The division between the Jews and the Gentiles was indicative of the division between sinful man and a holy God.
         2. And the real path to reconciliation was not to solve a social problem but to solve a spiritual problem through the work of Christ.
         3. We have many in the world today who see all the divisions in the world and see them as merely a social problem.
            1. They say that to fix these divisions, we must unite and do this or that.
            2. We have to get people together and have a conversation if we are to fix the hostility that exists between people of various backgrounds or ethnic groups or political parties, or, even on a global scale, between various nations.
            3. But that is a denial of what we see in this passage, that man’s fundamental problem is not social, it is spiritual.
            4. The reason man is not reconciled to himself is because he is not reconciled to God.
            5. And, Paul insists in this passage, that you cannot fix a spiritual problem with a social solution.
            6. If you could, the Son of God would never have needed to die on a cross.
            7. All that would have been needed was for people to have a conversation and get together and fix their social ills.
            8. But the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ says that such a solution is impossible, and the only path to reconciliation and unity is the Calvary Road that leads to the cross of Christ.
   2. Man’s fundamental need, then, is not to be reconciled with other people, but to be reconciled through Christ to God.
      1. Only God can create this reconciliation.
      2. Only God can deal with the hostility that exists toward sinners because of His wrath.
      3. And only God can reconcile human parties that were formerly hostile to one another in one body so that they are now one new humanity in His Son, reconciled not only to God but also to one another.
      4. And we see that He did this only through Christ.
   3. In this passage, we see three ways we can be sure that Christ alone is our peace, and we have looked at the first one already, namely, Christ Himself is our peace because of…
2. What He Performed (vv. 14-16)
   1. If you have been following along the past few weeks, you may have noticed I have reworded the outline a bit here.
      1. You’ll see why in a minute, but the essence is the same.
      2. Christ Himself is our peace because of what He performed in His death on the cross.
   2. What did He perform?
      1. He made two groups into one.
      2. And He broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.
      3. He joined together Jews and Gentiles and destroyed what stood between them.
   3. He did this by abolishing in His flesh on the cross the old covenant with its commandments contained in ordinances.
   4. And the result of this supernatural work was creating a new humanity out of two formerly hostile groups and reconciling both of these groups in one body, which is the church, to God by means of the cross, where Jesus crucified the enmity that existed between God and us because of our sins.
   5. That’s what He performed to demonstrate that He Himself is our peace.
      1. This new creation, this new humanity, this new body known as the church, full of Jews and Gentiles and people of all different kinds united together as a reconciled group to God, gives unmistakable evidence that Christ is our peace.
      2. This is what Christ performed.
   6. Now, moving on to the second point this morning, we also see that Christ Himself is our peace because of…
3. What He Proclaimed (v. 17)
   1. When we come to this verse, it’s important we see the order of the passage and the case that the Apostle is making.
      1. Verses 14-16 speak objectively of what Christ did on the cross.
      2. These supernatural acts of creating a new humanity and reconciling sinners to God were an accomplished fact at the cross, and Christ did all that needed to be done for those things to happen in the lives of men and women who trusted in Him.
      3. But for sinners to believe in Him, the good news of what He did had to be proclaimed.
      4. The gospel had to go out for people to hear it.
      5. For, as Paul says in Romans 10, how will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?
      6. Faith comes by hearing, right?
      7. It does, it comes by hearing the word of Christ.
      8. And so we move from what Christ performed on the cross to the message He proclaimed to sinners, announcing the good news of this great accomplishment of reconciliation and salvation.
   2. The immediate question that is raised in v. 17 is this: When did Christ go and preach peace to those who were far away and to those who were near?
      1. When Paul describes those who were near, it is evident that he means the Jews.
      2. And when he says to the Ephesians, **“you who were far away,”** it is evident he means these Gentile Christians, or at least some group of Gentile Christians with whom the Ephesians might identify.
      3. And so when did Christ preach this message of peace to Jews and Gentiles?
      4. We can look at the ministry of Christ in the Gospels to find Him often preaching to the Jews.
         1. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 stands as one example of many of Jesus preaching to Jews.
         2. But we don’t have any examples of Jesus ever traveling to the lands of the Gentiles and preaching the good news to the Gentiles.
         3. In fact, in Matt 10:5 Jesus explicitly told even His disciples not to preach in the lands of the Gentiles.
         4. And when a group of Greeks came to Jesus in John 12 and wanted to see Him, He gave a somewhat cryptic answer that if they wanted to be where He was they needed to follow Him, but it does not appear He gave them an audience at that time.
         5. Jesus’ earthly ministry, then, was to Jews and not to Gentiles.
         6. He was, as He said in Matt 15:24, sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
      5. Another problem with seeing this preaching in Eph 2:17 as being during Jesus’ earthly ministry is that it seems to take place sequentially after the crucifixion.
         1. He performed this incredible reconciling work on the cross in vv. 14-16.
         2. And then in v. 17 Paul says that Jesus preached peace to Gentiles like the Ephesians as well as Jews like Paul.
         3. But once again we don’t have any record of Jesus, after His resurrection, preaching to Gentiles, or even Jews.
         4. He does spend time with His disciples, instructing them after the resurrection, but it’s not like His earthly preaching ministry at all.
      6. To deal with this, some have said that Paul does not mean that Jesus actually preached peace verbally, but that the cross merely stands as a symbol of peace between God and man, and symbolically the cross preaches peace.
         1. That might make sense to us in our idioms and patterns of thinking, but it’s problematic with the Greek text.
         2. The word for **preached** in Greek is the word from which we get the word **evangelize**, and it meant quite literally to proclaim words of good news.
         3. It is tied in with verbal proclamation, with words that are spoken, words of hope and life and joy and peace, words that bring encouragement and comfort and healing.
         4. It’s not metaphorical, and it wasn’t used of non-verbal images that may or may not communicate something to the observer.
      7. It’s better to understand what Paul means this way: Christ through His representatives like Paul preached the good news of peace to Gentiles and to Jews.
         1. We can see this concept clearly in a parallel passage – 2 Cor 5:17-20.
         2. First, notice the parallels here between reconciliation and new creation, the same themes we just saw in Eph 2:14-16.
            1. Everyone in Christ is a new creature; the old things, including even the old covenant as we saw a few weeks ago just a few chapters earlier in 2 Cor 3, have passed away, and new things have come to take their place.
            2. God did all of this, the same God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ.
            3. New creation and reconciliation go hand in hand.
            4. To be reconciled, we must be made new.
            5. And God did this through Christ.
         3. And then Paul says something very interesting: God gave us, the apostles, the ministry of reconciliation.
            1. What does that mean?
            2. He explains it in v. 19.
            3. God brought about forgiveness of sins for those in Christ through the work of Christ on the cross.
            4. Jesus performed that work.
            5. But God committed to the apostles the task of taking the word, or the message, of reconciliation to the world God reconciled to Himself.
            6. Christ performs the work required to reconcile the world to God, but Christ personally does not go out and preach the word of reconciliation; that task is given to the apostles.
         4. And that leads Paul to say in v. 20 that we are ambassadors…
            1. Paul says, “When I am preaching the gospel to you, it is not me who is preaching the gospel to you, but God in Christ.”
            2. I am just an ambassador who is delivering the message, the sermon, Christ is preaching to you.
            3. That’s why Paul could say to the Thessalonians that when they heard the word of God from Paul and his associates they received it for what it really was, the word of God (1 Thess 2:13).
            4. They recognized that what they heard was not Paul speaking, but Christ speaking through Paul to them and Christ proclaiming peace to them through this apostle.
      8. This mantle was passed from the apostles to the pastor-teachers and evangelists of the church who come and proclaim peace through the cross of Christ, so that each week when the church gathers together to hear the Word of Christ, inasmuch as the preacher says what the Word says, the church hears not the human messenger but the Lord of the Church speaking to His people.
      9. Christ continues today speaking and preaching peace as faithful men stand and proclaim the Word of God faithfully and accurately in the power of the Holy Spirit.
      10. And that is why preaching, as foolish as it is in the eyes of the world, is so mighty in the hands of God, because it is not a man speaking or giving a speech but it is God speaking through that lowly, feeble, weak, flawed man.
      11. And that is why preaching has come under attack and continues to be attacked, because the devil does not want sinners to hear the voice of Christ proclaiming peace through the blood of His cross through those who preach the Word.
   3. I want you to notice that not only does Christ Himself through His chosen instruments preach peace, He only has one message of peace for all people.
      1. This brings us back to the message of unity of Jews and Gentiles in vv. 14-16.
      2. There is only one message of peace, and that message of peace is for those who are far away from God and for those who are near to God.
      3. In the context of Isaiah 57:19, which is what Paul is alluding to in this verse, those who were far away were Jews living away from the land of Israel, while those who were near were the Jews living in the land of Israel.
         1. Paul, however, expands those who were far away to include not only Jews living far from Israel but Gentiles as well.
         2. He has warrant to do this from passages like Isaiah 56:6-8, just a chapter before this statement, where God declares that His house will be a house of prayer for all the nations, including the Gentiles who are scattered throughout the world.
      4. And the point that Paul pulls from this verse is this: No matter where you live or who you are, there is only one gospel that can save you and bring you peace with God.
         1. In fact, it doesn’t matter how close or how far you are to God, if you don’t have the gospel, you don’t have peace with God.
         2. We might look at our world today and see so many people that seem so far from God.
            1. They go out and get drunk every weekend, they do drugs, they sleep around, they engage in homosexual behavior, they are violent and rebellious, and they seem like they could not be further away from God.
            2. What would the message be to such people as this, who seem to have no interest in God or what is right or the Word or morals or anything good?
            3. The message is peace through the blood of Christ, is it not?
            4. It’s the one and only gospel no matter how far you are from Christ!
         3. And then we might also look at many religious people today, and perhaps they seem so close to the kingdom of God.
            1. They have an interest in morality.
            2. They might even speak of God.
            3. Perhaps they go to church or even read the Bible once in a while
            4. And we think to ourselves, “Oh, that person is so close to the kingdom of God!”
            5. What would we say to the moral person, the religious person, the good person who is striving to be an upright citizen and help his neighbors?
            6. It is the same message we would say to the drunkard – there is only peace for you in Christ and His cross!
         4. When it comes to the kingdom of God, see, being near and far really are about the same thing.
            1. Martyn Lloyd-Jones used the illustration of a train.
            2. You have your boarding pass for the train, and you are rushing like mad to get to the station on time.
            3. And just as you arrive at the station and get to the platform you see the train pulling away, you arrived too late and you missed it.
            4. Maybe a few hours later another passenger arrives, and he has missed the train, too, just by a lot more than you.
            5. What difference is there between these two passengers who missed the train?
            6. None, really.
            7. They both still sit at the train station having missed the train.
            8. Whether you miss it by 5 seconds or you miss it by 5 hours is irrelevant, you missed it!
            9. Whether you are near or far to the kingdom of God is irrelevant if you are not in the kingdom of God through Christ.
         5. Listen to this now, friends: Too many people today are content to be near the kingdom of God who are not in the kingdom of God.
            1. Oh they’ll go to church here and there.
            2. They’ll read their Bible once in a while and maybe even pray at meals or on special occasions.
            3. They will try to be good neighbors and dutiful citizens.
            4. They will try to be good husbands and fathers or wives and mothers.
            5. They pay their bills, they go to work, they mow their grass, and they live a life that looks so good on the outside.
            6. But inside they know they have never really put their faith in Christ.
            7. They are near to the kingdom, and they make a show of religion, but their hearts are cold to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
            8. And they know this is true of themselves because they do not have peace with God.
            9. There is a constant struggle within their own hearts and minds, a constant battle with their conscience which never ceases condemning them for their sins.
            10. There is inner-turmoil, and they try to repress it and push it down, down, down, and it turns into anxiety and worry and stress.
            11. And so they lose sleep, or they look for other remedies to their inner-turmoil and their lack of peace.
            12. Where does this lack of peace come from?
            13. It comes because they are near the kingdom but they are not in the kingdom of God.
            14. And the sad reality is that they have just as little peace as those who are far from the kingdom who do not repress their evil desires but indulge them and drown their lack of peace in all kinds of vice.
            15. Outwardly, everything is nice and pretty and clean, but inwardly there is a storm.
            16. Friends, to be near the kingdom of God is not the same as to be in the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ.
            17. To seek to go through life being a good, religious person who checks all the boxes and does all the right things is not the same as being made completely new by the transforming power of the Spirit of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ.
            18. The question today is not, “Are you near or far to the kingdom of God?”
            19. The question is this: Do you have peace with God? Are you in the kingdom of God? Have you been made new?
            20. Having been justified by faith, do you now have peace with God?
            21. I plead with you this morning that you not be content with being near but that you make sure you are in the kingdom.
   4. The last thing I want you to see this morning is that this one gospel for all sinners, whether near or far, is a message of peace.
      1. The past century has made it evident perhaps more than ever before how much we need peace in our broken, war torn world.
         1. The end of the 19th century brought such hope to the world that things were going to improve.
         2. Technological advancements had given everyone hope that finally we would arrive at utopia in the 20th century.
         3. But just the opposite happened, right?
         4. Ruthless dictators, totalitarian regimes, world wars, cold wars, terrorism and the resulting wars on terror, poverty, revolutions, anger, hatred, division, strife, legalized abortion, and more all have contributed to the bloodiest 100 years in human history with the lone exception of the Flood in Genesis 6-8.
         5. The family is in shambles.
         6. Violence is on the rise.
         7. People on both sides of the political spectrum in our nation are buying guns and ammunition at a rate that should alarm anyone paying attention.
         8. We are seeing the fulfillment of Isaiah 57:20-21, where the prophet says, **“But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”**
         9. The world doesn’t experience peace, but it is in tumult like the tossing sea, and the result is devastation, refuse and mud.
         10. This lack of peace is on a global scale and on a personal scale.
         11. Nations go to war, people within nations hate one another, and people within themselves are like the tossing sea, their hearts never at rest.
         12. Brothers and sisters, we need to remember that in the middle of a world at war with itself and within itself, we have the only message of peace through the cross of Christ.
      2. This message of peace dominated the life of our Lord.
         1. At His birth, the angels sang out, **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased”** (Luke 2:14).
         2. Before Jesus went to the cross, He said to His disciples in John 14:27, **“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you... Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”**
            1. Brothers and sisters, we have to understand that when we look at the world around us and see the chaos and the disorder and the potential for more chaos and disorder as an election looms in seven weeks, that we must take this exhortation to heart.
            2. Our gospel is a gospel of peace, and we must manifest that peace as those who believe that gospel.
            3. Our hearts must not be troubled.
            4. We must not be fearful because Christ through His sacrifice has given us His peace.
            5. How can we be faithful ambassadors of the peace of Christ if our lives are marked by anxiety and fear?
            6. Won’t our own hearts contradict the message of peace Christ committed to us to proclaim?
         3. In John 20:19, when Jesus came to the disciples that first Lord’s day evening after He rose from the dead, the first thing He said to the disciples was, **“Peace be with you.”**
            1. His message was constantly a message of peace.
            2. And His cross, that violent, bloody death He suffered, was for the purpose of bringing us peace.
      3. Now we are in the kingdom of God, a kingdom, Paul says in Romans 14:17, that is marked by righteousness and peace and joy.
         1. The church of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God manifest on earth, should be marked by peace.
         2. We are to be people who live in peace because we have peace with God and with one another through Christ.
      4. Another verse that Paul seems to have in mind in Eph 2:17 is Isaiah 52:7…
         1. This gospel is a message of peace, and there is nothing more beautiful than to proclaim this peace, to announce this good news, to tell of salvation and the joy that comes from the truth that our God reigns.
         2. One reason the wicked have no peace is because they are in rebellion against the reign of God.
         3. You can’t have peace when your entire existence is set on rebellion against God’s authority.
         4. But the good news of salvation, the good news of peace, the good news of the gospel that brings joy is that God offers peace to rebels.
         5. God offers peace to the wicked.
         6. God offers rest to those who are in turmoil.
         7. God offers calm and stillness of soul to those whose hearts are troubled and afflicted by their own sin.
         8. And that offer of peace is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
         9. The gospel is the message of peace for a world at war with its Creator.
         10. The cross of Christ is the terms of peace.
      5. Here’s a question for reflection: Does your life reflect the truth that the gospel is a message of peace?
4. Conclusion
   1. Maybe it doesn’t.
      1. Maybe that means there are some areas where you are not trusting God in your life.
      2. Maybe that means there are some relationships you need to mend.
      3. Maybe that means you need to spend more time in prayer because you are not, as the old hymn says, taking everything to God in prayer, and therefore you are forfeiting peace that should be yours in Christ.
      4. Maybe that means you need to repent of some sin in your life.
      5. Maybe that means your mind has been conformed to this world by the things you watch and listen to and the people you’re around, and you need to change some habits so that your mind is renewed day by day and conformed to the will of God.
      6. The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news of peace, peace with God, peace with other believers, and peace of mind through fellowship with God in Christ.
      7. May our lives manifest the reality of that peace.
   2. And for some, maybe your life does not manifest peace because you are near the kingdom but you are not in the kingdom.
      1. I’m glad you’re here this morning and that you are coming near the kingdom, but I plead with you in the name of Christ not to be content merely to come near.
      2. Come into the kingdom by turning away from your sin and trusting in Christ’s saving work on the cross to save you from the wrath of God.
      3. And when you believe in Christ, having been justified by faith, you will have peace with God.