**Christ Is Our Peace, Part 5**

**Ephesians 2:18**

**September 20, 2020**

1. Introduction
   1. Spending time in prayer results in great blessing for the follower of Jesus Christ.
      1. Prayer promotes gratitude in our hearts as we praise and thank God for the things He has done for us, and people that are thankful are generally happier and lead lives that are more fulfilled.
      2. Prayer relieves the burden of guilt that can weigh on our conscience as we come before God’s throne of grace and confess our sins to Him.
         1. We might think of the psalmist in Psalm 32 who speaks of the great blessing on the person whose sin is forgiven.
         2. And in Psalm 32:3-6 we read…
         3. We see the destructive effect that keeping silent about our sin has not only spiritually but physically as well.
         4. It drains our strength and takes its toll on our minds and our bodies.
         5. But when we confess our sins to the Lord and we go to Him in prayer, we find forgiveness and comfort and relief for our souls.
         6. And so David says that everyone who is godly should pray, because David had personally experienced the blessing of God’s forgiveness.
      3. Prayer promotes love in our hearts toward others as we intentionally think of them and their needs and bring them and those concerns before God.
      4. Prayer allows us to hide God’s Word in our hearts as we meditate on the truths of Scripture and pray through various passages in God’s Word or pray through the attributes of God and focus our minds on what is true and lovely and noble.
      5. Prayer brings about the will of God in the world.
         1. In some mysterious way, God uses our prayers to accomplish His purposes.
         2. We can’t begin to understand the mystery of divine sovereignty and human prayer, but in a way that God understands and we simply trust, God moves our hearts to pray and then uses those prayers to accomplish His sovereign will.
         3. And the great blessing for us is that we get to be a part of what God is doing in the world when we spend time in His presence in prayer, seeking His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.
      6. But one of the greatest blessings of all the believer personally experiences through prayer is the blessing of peace.
         1. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5:7 to cast all of our anxieties on God, because God cares for us.
         2. We don’t have to carry the burden of worry and anxiety as believers because we have a loving Father who willingly will bear those burdens for us out of love for us.
         3. Philippians 4:6-7 tells us that the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ when we bring everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving.
         4. And we will not be able to understand how this peace works or why prayer has this effect because this peace is beyond human comprehension.
         5. But the reality is that prayer is a means of peace in our hearts and peace in our minds, it is a means of peace with others as we pray for them, and it is a means of peace in our relationship with God as we confess our sins and fellowship with our heavenly Father.
   2. As we continue our study of Ephesians 2, we come to v. 18, which is a verse that brings prayer into focus in the context of Christ being our peace.
      1. This section began by showing us that Christ is our peace because of what He performed, namely, the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles to God in one body, the church, through the work of Christ on the cross.
      2. Then Paul went on to show in v. 18 that Christ is our peace because of what He proclaimed: one gospel that brings peace for both Jews and Gentiles.
      3. And now, in v. 18, Paul shows us that Christ is our peace because of what He provides, namely access to the Father for both Jews and Gentiles in one Spirit.
      4. This access we rightly equate with prayer.
   3. I want you to notice how Paul’s argument builds.
      1. Christ has accomplished this great work of reconciliation on the cross.
      2. We receive the peace He achieved through His death and resurrection through hearing the gospel with faith.
      3. And we walk in that peace, we live in that peace, we enjoy that peace through a vital relationship with God in prayer, as we now have this glorious and indescribable access to the Father.
      4. We, then, as believers, are reconciled to God in one body, having believed in one gospel, relating to God in one Spirit, demonstrating that Christ has brought us peace with God and with one another in a way that goes beyond any kind of peace this world can ever fathom.
      5. One of the great evidences of this peace, and at the same time one of the great means to enjoy this peace, is the exercise of prayer.
      6. This verse is in a sense the climax of Paul’s statement that began in v. 14, because here we see the true meaning and the true greatness of this peace: it is a peace that allows us to enter the very presence of God.
      7. And when we come into God’s presence, we do not find a god who is hostile to us or who treats us like slaves who are nothing more than his property, but we find God to be our Father; we find that we have peace with God.
   4. This morning I want to spend our time in v. 18 considering what Christ has provided as our peace and the greatness of it so that the Spirit of God might stir our hearts to prayer.
   5. First, it is significant that you see that Christ as our peace has provided…
2. Access to the Father (v. 18)
   1. Notice v. 18 as Paul describes what Christ has provided as our peace.
      1. Access to the Father!
      2. No longer alienated, no longer far off, no longer even merely near the kingdom, but now we enter into the very presence of God the Father.
   2. The word translated **access** is a rare word in the NT.
      1. It is only used in two other places in the NT, one of which is Eph 3:12, which is a very similar verse to this one.
      2. It is a Greek word derived from two words that mean *to lead toward*.
      3. We get a sense of the meaning of this word in its use in Romans 5:1-2, where Paul writes…
         1. The word in Romans 5:2 is translated **introduction.**
         2. When we hear that word, we perhaps most commonly think of the beginning of something, like an introduction to algebra or physics, or the introduction of a novel or a play.
         3. But here the word has the idea of a royal throne room.
         4. And the image is of the king sitting on his throne holding court, and someone desires an audience with the king.
         5. The problem is that unless you were summoned by the king or you were a close relation of the king, you would not have any access to him.
         6. Much like today, if you were to visit the White House, as we did three years ago and toured it, you would not be able to access the president even if he happened to be there at the same time as you.
         7. The only way to gain that access is for someone who has access to the president to grant you an introduction to him.
         8. In Romans 5:1-2, then, Paul is saying that Christ has given us access to grace by giving us an introduction to it, being the bridge between God’s grace and sinful people.
      4. When we look at Ephesians 2:18, we see the wonder of this access to the Father, because in this description is the implication that in ourselves we had no access to the Father.
      5. We needed someone to introduce us to the Father, to grant us an audience with Him.
      6. Christ, who Himself is our peace, is the one who grants us this access, this introduction to the Father so that we might know and relate to Him as our Father.
   3. I want you also to notice that our access it to the Father Himself.
      1. We have already seen the intimate access we have with the Father unveiled a little bit in Ephesians so far.
         1. For example, in Ephesians 1:3, Paul noted that it was the Father who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.
            1. The Father Himself bestows all of these rich blessings upon us.
            2. He is not aloof or distant to us, or indifferent toward us.
            3. The Father Himself loves us and blesses us and in this sense is very personally involved in our lives.
         2. And then in Eph 1:17 Paul’s prayer was that God the Father, the Father of glory (as He was called there), may give to us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.
            1. Paul’s appeal in prayer was directly to the Father.
            2. And his prayer was that the Father of glory, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, would continue to pour out His grace upon us by giving us wisdom and understanding of who He is in all of His glorious greatness and riches and majesty.
      2. I think for many Christians it’s difficult to wrap our minds around this level of intimacy with the Father.
         1. We perhaps are more comfortable thinking about a relationship with the Son than with the Father.
         2. And to an extent that makes sense because the Son became man, and so we can relate to Him directly as a human being, even as God in human flesh.
         3. We also know that the Son is the one mediator between God and us.
         4. And so sometimes we perhaps think of a close walk with Jesus but the Father is somewhat distant from our thoughts, distant from our minds, distant from our prayer lives even.
      3. And yet we see here in Eph 2:18 that Christ as our Mediator brings us into the presence of the Father so that we have access to Him and can speak to Him directly.
         1. In fact, no one modeled this for us more clearly than the Lord Himself.
         2. Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father, who is in heaven.”
         3. Jesus, through His teaching on prayer, encourages and emboldens us to go to the Father in our prayers and to pray directly to the Father, knowing that He is our Father and that He loves us and has accepted us as His beloved children.
         4. Brothers and sisters, has it recently, or maybe has it ever, occurred to you that God the Father desires to have you in His presence?
         5. Do you realize that God the Father wants to hear from you, that He desires you to pray to Him, to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him?
         6. Have you considered that it is God the Father who hears and answers your prayers according to His perfect will for you in Christ Jesus?
         7. If we consider Eph 3:12 in this context, we are reminded that this access to the Father is not the access that is afraid or groveling.
         8. We don’t come to the Father like Esther did to King Ahasuerus, not knowing if he will extend the scepter to her and whether her approach will be received well or cost her her life.
         9. We come to the Father with confidence and boldness.
         10. We come to the Father the way children run to their dad when he arrives home from work, with joy and confidence and boldness and delight.
         11. We go before our heavenly Father like children when they are hurt might run to their father for comfort in affliction, no though that they won’t be accepted but confidence that it is their father who will comfort them.
         12. We sing a song sometimes, “How Deep the Father’s Love For Us.”
         13. Do we recognize how true those words are?
         14. We can draw near to our Father with confidence to receive grace and mercy to help us in our times of need.
      4. Jesus is our peace, then, because He has provided to us this marvelous access to the Father.
   4. Now, we need to go back a few words and be reminded that this access to the Father is…
3. Through the work of the Son (v. 18)
   1. Paul notes at the very beginning of this verse that this access to the Father is only through the Son.
      1. This accords with what our Lord Himself said in John 14:6 – **“No one comes to the Father but through Me.”**
      2. Through Christ, and Christ alone, we have this access.
   2. As we think about this, we need to recognize the importance of this access and prayer in relation to the work of Christ.
      1. The New Testament gives many reasons why Christ died for His people.
         1. He died to forgive us our sins.
         2. He died to reconcile us to God.
         3. He died to create us as a new humanity.
         4. He died to fulfill the Law.
         5. And we could go on and on.
      2. But one significant reason that He died that we might perhaps overlook is to bring us into the presence of God.
         1. The writer of Hebrews, as he discourses about the superior priesthood of Christ over that of Levi, reminds his readers of the superiority of the new covenant.
            1. Why was the new covenant superior?
            2. We see that one blessing of the new covenant was that everyone who participates in that covenant would know the Lord.
            3. We all would have an intimacy with God through the new covenant.
            4. And so Jesus, as our great high priest, died that we might enjoy this experience of being in God’s presence as His new covenant people, knowing Him in this personal way.
         2. Peter, in 1 Peter 3:18, wrote…
            1. Notice the direct connection Peter makes between Christ’s death and Christians being brought near to God.
            2. Christ died for the purpose of bringing us to God.
            3. One of the reasons why He hung on that cross was that through His work on the cross we might have this confident access to God.
      3. When we talked about every spiritual blessing in Eph 1:3, we need to be reminded that one of those spiritual blessings God has given us in Christ is the blessing of prayer, by which we experience our access to God.
         1. Jesus died on the cross to secure these blessings.
         2. And sometimes our attitude about prayer can be an insult to the cross of Christ, can’t it?
         3. How difficult it can be to pray!
         4. How much our flesh resists prayer!
         5. How easily we are distracted by every triviality once we are in prayer!
         6. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, “I suppose that in the last analysis, the most difficult thing we ever try to do, because it is the greatest thing we ever do, is to pray.”
         7. Does that statement resonate with you?
         8. I know it often does with me.
         9. We can so easily feel that prayer is a burden, an obligation, something we will do only if we have enough time after we have done the most important things in life.
         10. But brothers and sisters, prayer, access to the Father, may very well be the most important thing you need to do.
         11. And our attitude about prayer reveals our true attitude about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.
         12. Those who do not value prayer, those who do not appreciate prayer, those who have no time or interest in prayer, ultimately indicate that they have little interest in the benefits that come from the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.
         13. Thankfully, the Lord forgives us for our weakness, because the flesh is often weak, and we pray far too little.
         14. Nevertheless, we should pay attention to how we think about prayer, because one of the reasons Jesus died on the cross was that we might enjoy this access to the Father.
         15. Do we delight in the cross of Christ?
         16. Then we should want to enjoy all of the blessings He purchased for us there.
      4. Christ, through His work on the cross, provided access to the Father.
   3. Now, we must not skip the important statement Paul makes when he tells us that this access comes to us…
4. In the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 18)
   1. Notice how he says that we have this access **in one Spirit**.
      1. He emphasizes here the unity of the Holy Spirit.
      2. There is only one Holy Spirit.
      3. Just like there is only one body of Christ, the church, and just like there is only one gospel of Jesus Christ, so there is only one Spirit in which all believers have their access to God.
      4. This again reminds us of our unity in Christ, the objective unity that exists among us because we are all in one Spirit.
      5. And that should remind us all of the importance of seeking to live out that unity, recognizing that the same Spirit who is in me is in you.
      6. That could be an entire sermon series in itself, and it will be when we get to Ephesians 4!
      7. But I just want to note it here.
   2. The vital thing Paul is talking about here, though, is our access to God by this one Spirit, and so we need to understand what it means that we have this access in one Spirit.
      1. The prophet Jude, in his little epistle before Revelation, puts it like this in Jude 20, **“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.”**
         1. As followers of Christ who have this access to God, we must be mindful that our access is in the Spirit.
         2. And so we are to come to God in the Spirit and to pray in the Spirit of God.
         3. But, of course, that raises the question, What does it mean to pray in the Spirit of God?
      2. Now there are many misinterpretations of this and many more misapplications of it.
         1. For example, one particular strand of theology would take this to mean that we must pray in tongues.
            1. To tackle that in detail would take some time that we don’t have this morning.
            2. But we can summarize the issues with this simply by noting that nowhere in the NT do we see that praying in tongues is normative for the Christian.
            3. Tongues was a spiritual gift, and not everyone had it, which means not everyone could pray in tongues.
            4. But every believer is called to pray in the Spirit, so the NT writers must mean something besides praying in tongues since that was not available to every Christian, nor was it designed by God to be something all Christians did.
         2. Others take a statement like this and turn it into some sort of call to emotionalism.
            1. To pray in the spirit is to pray fervently, they say.
            2. Or it is to pray with a great deal of emotion.
            3. The problem with this understanding is that being highly emotional is not a NT mark of the presence of the Spirit of God.
            4. In fact, we might say that the opposite is a manifestation of His presence since the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.
         3. Some have confused Romans 8:26-27 with praying in the Spirit.
            1. Paul wrote…
            2. The problem with seeing this as praying in the Spirit is that in this passage we are not the ones praying.
            3. Paul specifically says that there are times when, because of our human weakness, we do not know how to pray.
            4. But the Spirit always knows how to pray, so we can have confidence that when we don’t know how to pray, the Spirit does know how to pray for us and He is praying for us according to the will of God.
            5. And He prays in a divine language that human words cannot capture, these groanings which are too deep for words.
            6. Sometimes we get stuck, and we don’t know the will of God in a situation, but we don’t need to despair but to trust that the Spirit of God knows the will of God and He, through His prayers for us, ensures that it happens.
            7. That’s why we can have the confidence of Romans 8:28, because the Spirit is interceding for us to ensure that everything in our lives works together for our good.
      3. What is it, then, to pray in the Spirit, to have this access to God in one Spirit?
         1. First, I think we must assert at once that to pray in the Spirit is to pray in such a way that all of our focus and attention is directed to the glory of Christ.
            1. We read in John 16:14 that the role of the Spirit of God is to glorify the Son of God.
            2. And that means that if we are truly praying in the Spirit all of our focus and all of our attention will be directed to the glory of Christ.
            3. Our prayers will be shaped by a desire to see Christ glorified in our lives.
            4. To put it negatively, our prayers will never become self-centered.
            5. We will not pray in such a way as if we are treating God like a genie or like Santa Claus, fulfilling our wish list.
            6. When we are in the presence of God and filled with the Spirit of God we pray with the aim of the glory of God in view.
         2. Second, to pray in the Spirit means to pray according to the revealed Word of God.
            1. If we are praying in the Spirit, we are going to be praying in the truth.
            2. Our prayers will be directed not only by a heartfelt desire to see Christ glorified but by the revealed Word of God that tells us what tends to His glory.
            3. Many times we perhaps think we can determine what will glorify Christ mystically or through our own logic or reasoning, but the person who is praying in the Spirit will recognize that the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to teach us what glorifies God.
            4. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that the time was coming when true worshipers would worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.
            5. See, the Spirit and the truth always go together.
            6. In fact, the Spirit is the Spirit of truth according to John 16:13.
            7. And so it is a mistake to think that we can pray in the Spirit if our prayers are detached from the Word of God.
         3. Third, to pray in the Spirit means that we pray with the aim of being fruitful for the kingdom of God.
            1. Listen to what Jesus said in John 15:7-8…
            2. Here we see a marvelous key to successful prayer.
            3. We have seek to glorify God in our prayers and the Word of God dwells richly within us as we pray, and then guided by a desire for His glory and the truth of His Word, we ask God to make us fruitful in His service.
            4. And we don’t just pray this for ourselves but for other believers as well.
            5. Listen to what Paul prayed for the Thessalonians in 2 Thess 1:11-12…
            6. Notice how it is the same thing Jesus said we should pray for ourselves!
            7. He prayed that God would fulfill every desire the Thessalonians had to do what was good and to express their faith in powerful works for the glory of Christ.
            8. He prayed that they would, to use Jesus’ phrase in John 15, bear much fruit, and that Christ would be glorified in them, and they in Him.
            9. Spirit-directed prayer is kingdom-directed prayer.
            10. It is not prayer that is primarily concerned with the temporal things of this life, although we certainly can pray for those things as well since we are to cast all of our anxieties on the Lord, but it is prayer that is concerned with being fruitful in the kingdom of God for His glory.
         4. Fourth, to pray in the Spirit means to pray in such a way that reflects the character of the Spirit.
            1. What is the character of the Spirit?
            2. It’s the fruit of the Spirit, right?
            3. Our prayers should tend toward reflecting the love of God.
            4. Our prayers should be joyful prayers that delight to see others experiencing the joy of the Spirit in their lives.
            5. Our prayers should tend toward peace with others, which helps us know how to pray in the midst of conflict and gives some content to Jesus’ command to pray for our enemies.
            6. We could go through the list, but you get the idea.
            7. Praying in the Spirit is praying that reflects who the Spirit is and that desires for us and others to walk in a manner that reflects His character.
         5. Finally, to pray in the Spirit means to pray with humility and a sincere conviction of our sin.
            1. We are reminded that our access to the Father is never because we earned it or deserved it.
            2. We are reminded that this access in the Spirit was bought for us by the blood of Christ.
            3. And so we pray with gratitude, with humility, and with an awareness of the magnitude of what Christ did to bring us into the presence of God and introduce us to the Father.
            4. The Spirit also convicts us when we sin, and so to pray in the Spirit as believers means to confess our sins and to seek God’s grace to overcome temptation and put sin to death in our lives.
            5. Romans 8:13 tells us that we put sin to death in our lives by the Spirit of God, and that isn’t some strange or esoteric process available only to an enlightened few.
            6. It just means that we do it through faithful prayer in the Spirit.
            7. Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 6:18, right after detailing the full armor of God…

The last piece of armor he mentions is the Word of God.

And then he tells us to pray in the Spirit of God.

We take up the sword of the Spirit, and we go to the Father in prayer in the Spirit, and we fight the good fight of faith on our knees.

* + - 1. Praying in the Spirit, then, has nothing to do with some emotional experience or praying in tongues or anything else like that.
      2. Praying in the Spirit is quite simply praying for the glory of Christ according to the Word of God.

1. Conclusion
   1. Christ has provided access to the Father.
      1. This access comes through the work of Christ on the cross and through the work of the Spirit in our hearts as we enjoy the Father’s presence in prayer.
      2. And this privilege of prayer in the Spirit is the greatest mark and evidence that Christ is our peace, because we experience the reality of having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray in the Spirit.
   2. Paul has made a compelling argument in these verses that Christ alone is our peace.
      1. We see what He performed on the cross.
      2. We see what He proclaimed through His messengers.
      3. And we see what He provided in the Spirit.
   3. If you’re a believer in Jesus this morning, my prayer as I wrote this message and as I preach it is that the peace Christ gives would stir your hearts today to prayer.
      1. How I long to be a pastor who is more given to prayer in the Spirit.
      2. And how I long for us as a church to be a church that is continually growing in prayer in the Spirit both together for corporate times of prayer and individually as you spend time alone with God.
   4. If you’re here today and you are not a follower of Christ, this peace and this relationship with God is freely offered to you in the gospel of Jesus Christ…
   5. Christ Himself is our peace; may Desert Hills reflect that truth in every aspect of our life together as the body of Christ.