

Peace with God and Others

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[0 : 00] Well, if you're a regular here at St. C's, you know that we are working our way through this letter to the Ephesians. And the heart, the main idea in all of the letter to the Ephesians that Paul wrote is found in chapter one, verse 10.

So we looked at that for a few weeks, right at the beginning, where it says, Paul says, that the ultimate plan of God in all of world history is that God is bringing everything together in Jesus Christ through Jesus Christ, the King.

So everything that was splintered and fractured and broken from Genesis two and three all the way till now, Jesus is doing this work of bringing it back together.

So everything that was broken and fractured is going to become harmonious again. And that's the main thing Paul's saying, and he's saying it in hundreds of little ways all throughout this letter.

All the different ways that Jesus is doing this, and how's he doing it? He's doing it the past three weeks. We looked at Ephesians two, one to 10 by the power of the gospel. So through the cross of Jesus, God is reconciling all things to himself.

[1 : 11] And so that starts, if you're a Christian today with you, that if you are a believer in Jesus, God has now by the power of the cross and resurrection began the process of healing and bringing back together all the things in you that were fractured.

And so we said last week, God says you are his workmanship. His poetry is what that word means. I won't try to say the word I couldn't pronounce last week again after all the comments.

Poetry, art, you're his art. You are his workmanship. He's beautifying you. He's putting you back together. And this week, when you come to chapter two, verses 11 to 22, this is when he gives you the first really concrete example of that bringing things together that have once been fractured.

And so what we have here, what we just read, what Dean read for us is a case study in how God uses the power of the gospel to bring things together that were once split apart.

And the case study is about the Jews and the Gentiles, who were people that were fractured and completely set against one another at this time and how the gospel did something unbelievable, brought them together into the same space and made them even friends.

[2 : 26] And so that's what verses 11 down to 22 is about. We're going to look at it for two weeks and look at two big ideas. But Paul is doing something here that's not easy for us.

And you can see it in verse 11, the very first thing he says, we'll come back to the there for in a minute, but he says, remember, which is a word that relates to our human reason here.

If you translate it very literally, it could be something like, use your mind to consider, that's the phrase. So he's saying, think about, think about what? And we're going to see that he says, think about the hostility that was there between the Jews and the Gentiles apart from the gospel.

And he's calling on us because this is God's word to us too. He says, take a minute this morning. Will you take some time this morning as we look at this passage to think about all the hostility that has ever been present in your life between you and other people?

All the pain, all the resentment, all the separation. Here he's talking about hostility, hatred, divisiveness, neglect that came about through resentment towards people because of nationality, because of ethnicity, because of race, because of language, because of cultural barrier, because of clothing, because of all sorts of little cultural decisions about even the way people approach the dinner table that divides people.

[3 : 47] He's talking about division over political persuasion and parties. And he's talking about if we go deeper, every little hostility that we've ever experienced in our lives, road rage and anoints with people and the thousand little cuts that we experienced with the people that are closest to us.

So we alienate, we divide, we're hostile people to people between groups like ethnicities and then also with people that are most like us and closest to us as well.

Which means this is just a universal problem. We have hostility with people who are most unlike us and most like us. We can't get away. It's everywhere.

And that's exactly the issue he's talking about. Human creates hostility and alienation between people and the word here that he uses for hostility is a word that can also just be translated as hatred even.

And so that's the case study that he's dealing with. And Paul says, remember, think about it. Ask yourself this morning, what are the ways in my life now over many years where I've struggled even subtly with small or big hostility towards people because of their behavior, their lifestyle, their ethnicity or in the thousands of other ways that we might alienate.

[5 : 12] That's what he's asking us to do. So let's see that. First, let's consider the case study. And then secondly, the wall of hostility broken. How can we break through?

And then finally, what he calls here the new humanity that God is by the power of the gospel, building a new humanity. How do we get that? So first, this case study in human hostility between Jews and Gentiles, you'll see it in verse 11.

He says that one time you Gentiles in the flesh were called the uncircumcision by the Jews who were called the circumcision. And then he carries on into verse 12 and he says, remember you Gentiles.

So he's talking here to Ephesians Christians that were previously pagans, very literally, not using that word in derision, but just technically pagans.

They were worshiping many, many gods. And we haven't talked about this yet in Ephesians, but in the city of Ephesus, one of the great cities of the Roman Empire, there was one of the seven wonders of the world as we now label them, the temple of Artemis.

[6 : 18] It's destroyed. We don't have it anymore. The temple of Artemis, as we understand it, was one of the great architectural wonders of world history. People still aren't unsure of how they were able to build it at the time.

And it was a place where every single god was being worshiped, but the true God. And so here he says down in verse 13, you were strangers to Christ. You were not part of the citizenship of Israel. And then at the very last clause he said, you had no hope. You were without God in the world. Now that's a word without God in the world that we use for atheism. So it's a theism very literally, you were godless.

You didn't have God. And so he says here to them, you were separated from God and you were separated from one another. And he's talking first about their relationship to God just being very historically, very literally separated.

So they were not part of the covenant people of the Old Testament. They were without Christ, meaning without the anointed one. They literally did not know about the Messiah at all.

[7 : 24] So they're in Ephesus. They're worshiping at the temple of Artemis, worshiping many, many gods and they just didn't know God. They didn't know the real God.

And so he says because of that back one step in verse 11, you had this relationship between you and Gentile of hostility. You were separated.

So when he talks in verse 11, he said, you were called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision. He's talking about the name calling that that went on between Jew and Gentile at this time.

And so the Jews called the Gentiles the uncircumcised and we even see this in the gospel. Sometimes they would use the name dogs for the Gentiles.

And the Gentiles turned around and called the Jews dogs. So the Greeks thought the Jews were uneducated and the Jews thought the Greeks were unholy and it went in every direction.

[8 : 22] So this is not a Jewish thing or a Gentile thing. What we see here is this is a human thing and that there was hostility going in every single direction. And he's saying that if you were a Gentile, you look down on the Jews.

And if you were Jewish in this time, you look down on the Gentiles and you separate, you look down the nose as we say at the other person. And when you think of, you know, you go back to the Old Testament and you learn about God's revelation of Himself through Israel.

He said many, many times, Psalm 86 is one example, all the nations are going to come together and worship me. Through my revelation to Israel, everybody, every nation, every Gentile nation is going to come into worship and worship me.

And here we have a case study that the Gentiles and the Jews just separated themselves, no matter what they believed in. Now what about us?

He's talking here about a very human thing. We divide into teams. We divide into groups and hold enmity against people who aren't like us.

[9 : 31] And it's been happening for all of human history and it's not just Jew and Gentile, it's also Gentile to Gentile. There were thousands of ethnicities in this time and they all separated. They all were in derision against one another.

And Paul refers here to this symbol that he uses to talk about this. You can see it. He talks about the wall of hostility that had been created. So in the Jerusalem Temple, there was very literally a five foot wall.

And this was a wall at the very edge of the Jerusalem Temple and it was called the wall that separated the Jews from the Gentiles, the court of the Gentiles. And so no matter even if you came to faith, even if you believed in the true God, you were relegated to a court, a setting as far away from the center of the temple called the court of the Gentiles.

By a five foot wall, Paul here says that is the wall of hostility. And he says the wall of hostility doesn't just exist between Jew and Gentile, but between in the heart of every single person that's ever existed.

We all alienate, we've all separated, we all struggle with this. Sometimes think about it in our, sometimes people in a wealthy neighborhood look down on people even if we don't say it out loud, people that live in low income, poor neighborhoods.

[10 : 50] And people in poor neighborhoods look down on people who live in wealthy neighborhoods. I don't know if you've seen the recent Wonka movie. It's pretty good. But one of the characters, one of the bad guys in the Wonka movie is Mr. Ficklegruber.

And if you've seen it, you know that every time somebody says the word poor in front of Mr. Ficklegruber, he gags. He can't stand even hearing the word.

You see the wealthy look down on the poor and then the poor turn around and call the wealthy snobs. It goes in every direction. Somebody may be here, a woman in this room that's been hurt by a man.

And sometimes what happens after that is then you hold all, you can come to a place where you hold all men in derision. Where you don't have any regard for men. And some men here may have been hurt by a woman.

And you come front through that and you hold women, you hold women in derision. And it happens and you see, we're hot, we separate, we divide, we do it at every single level, we alienate.

[11 : 58] And we have alienation between political persuasions, between ethnicities, between rich and poor socioeconomic classes. Now all of you are well aware that in our modern world, in a city like Edinburgh, people are working very hard to stamp this out.

So we talk about this. People say, no, fight racism. Don't separate. Don't have hostility towards people. See the dignity and the value in every single person that lives in a city like Edinburgh. But part of the difficulty in that is modern people will talk about that. They'll say, and it's a very good thing to push back against hostility, to maintain peace. And at the same time, we don't know why. Modern people, we don't know why. Why is it? So Thomas Nagel, maybe you've come across this before, Thomas Nagel, who's a philosopher in the United States. He wrote a really important essay in the 1970s called The Absurdity of Life.

And this is what he says. He says, we are tiny specks in the infinite vastness of the universe. Our lives are mere instance, even on a geological time scale, let alone a cosmic scale.

[13 : 07] We will all be dead in any minute. We are, and this is a paraphrase from here, an accident on top of an accident. We're random. And one day, the sun will burn up and we will all freeze to death.

And there will be no memories left, no consciousness to remember anything we've ever done. Therefore, love one another.

Show dignity to every person. Stop racism. Fight to not separate. You know, we're all accidents upon accidents upon accidents.

And one day we'll all be dead and there's no memories left. And so you should love your neighbor as yourself. Now that is the ethic of modernity. And you can see that the therefore doesn't make any sense.

What is the therefore therefore? Now the Bible does better. Paul is coming here and saying, there is a reason for seeking peace. There is a reason to push back against the hostility we have in our hearts to people who aren't like us or are like us.

[14:09] And it's also a therefore. And it's the therefore that's found in verse 11. But Paul says therefore remember. And when he says therefore, he's trying to get us to go backwards one verse to remember.

What's the reason for pursuing peace with one another? And he says the reason is because you are the workmanship of God recreated in Christ Jesus for good works. In other words, he says because God has come to heal the vertical relationship you have, to bring you at peace with God the Father, now in your life you have a real reason to seek peace with one another.

In other words, he's telling us that he's telling us exactly why it will never work. Hostility will never stop. Why won't it stop? Because we will always be hostile. We will always be at war with other people as long as we are at war with God.

He says you've got to heal your vertical relationship if you ever want to heal horizontal relationships. Meaningfully, forever. And so he says therefore, he draws us back to verse 10.

And let's take it just a step further. He says if you're a Christian today, you are God's workmanship. You are being beautified by the gospel. You have peace with the Father, therefore you're called to have peace with other people, to seek, to put away any hostility in your heart towards other people.

[15:27] In other words, what he's saying is that the deep problem that creates hostility between humans, we're told here, is unbelief.

Unbelief, if you have unbelief, we have unbelief towards God the Father, then we're going to have hostility to neighbors. Why? Because unbelief is the hand that reaches into the glove of pride.

All the way back in the very beginning in Genesis 1 and 2, 2 and 3, we looked to God and said, I don't need you. I don't believe in you. I can live my life without you.

And what the Bible is saying is from that moment, that created not only hostility, enmity, war between us and God, but between us and every other person around us. He said, the more you embrace unbelief, the more and more you have hostility in the world.

And he's saying that that's because of our pride. It's because of our self-righteousness. He had just said just before, the gospel is about coming and saying, I have nothing to boast in.

[16:24] I have nothing to be prideful about. And so we look down our noses at God by sin and unbelief. And so we look down our noses at other people.

Self-righteousness, unbelief, it's at the heart of all hostility. It is what separates humanity. It is what keeps us from coming together. People in our time, in our city, people in the modern world are hungry for peace.

They're hungry to come together. They're hungry to be at one. And the Bible comes and says, you can never understand why you're in hostility and you can never heal from it, not ultimately until you see that you are at hostility, enmity, with God the Father.

And without that healing, there will never be true peace. Secondly, how can we have it? The wall has to be broken. All right, so he turns in verse 13 to tell us what we can do, how we can have it.

And he says in verse 13, but now in Christ, you who are far off have been brought near by the blood of Jesus. All right, remember if you were here with us the last few weeks, he said, you were dead in your trespasses and sins, but now, but God made you alive.

[17:38] Now he's doing it against talking specifically to Gentiles who were once pagans and saying, you were far away from God in the temple of Artemis, but now God has brought you near to him by the blood of the cross.

So he's doing a parallel thing as in the previous section. And he says in the next verse, he himself, Jesus, verse 14, has now become our peace.

So he says by the power of the cross, Jew and Gentile are now in the city of Ephesus worshiping together. And he says, Jesus is our peace.

Jesus is our peace. What kind of peace is he talking about here? When we think of peace, most of us probably first go to the inner tranquility that we long for in our lives.

So we think about the opposite of anxiety, the opposite of depression. We want in our hearts peace, rest. We want to be able to sleep at night. And that is something the gospel offers, but that's not exactly what he's talking about here.

[18:40] When he says he is our peace, he's talking about something very objective, very concrete, very visible. And when you go back to the Old Testament, there's an Old Testament scholar, Gerhard Esavan-Rod.

He says when you go somewhere like Psalm 85, the writer says righteousness when the Messiah comes, righteousness and peace shall kiss.

They'll come together. And Von Rod says when you look at the word peace throughout the Old Testament, there's a negative side, peace is the end of all warfare and the positive side, peace is the establishment of communities of justice and love.

So he says in the Old Testament, peace is not usually a word referring to inner tranquility, the absences of anxiety. Instead, peace in the Old Testament is ending warfare and creating communities of love.

It's very objective. It's very external. You can see it. Now what he says here is that because of the cross, Jesus Christ has become our peace. And he's talking about Jews and Gentiles that hated one another.

[19:49] They called each other dogs. They wouldn't eat together. They wouldn't share the same spaces. And he says, and because of the cross, Jesus has ended the warfare, but even more than that, that's not just peace.

Peace, he says peace in the Old Testament is love. It's shalom. It's actually, it's more. It's more than just saying, I'll be okay with you. We can share the same restaurant.

Peace is actually being in relationship. It's knowing the other person. It's sitting down to dinner. The greatest example I can think of that reflects what Paul's talking about here comes from where I grew up in the South in Mississippi and many other places in Mississippi and many other places in the US, especially in the South.

In the middle 20th century, we had the Jim Crow laws. And the Jim Crow laws separated black people from white people. And black people and white people, it was illegal for black people to eat in the same restaurant to ride on the same buses, to occupy the same seats, spaces, schools. And I think what Paul's saying here is, look, when Jim Crow ended, a lot of what happened was legally everybody had to be together. But that's not peace.

[21:04] He's talking about something more than that. Legally, people were in the same spaces and tolerated that. But he's saying, look up in the first century and realize that there are Jews and Gentiles, former pagans and people of the Old Covenant who are worshiping together in the same space and actually loving one another, knowing one another, communing together.

He says, that's the power of the gospel. He is our peace. That's what the gospel can do. And before we move on to the final thing, how does it happen? And this is what he says, but now in Christ Jesus, you've been brought near by the blood of Jesus, by the blood of Christ.

He is our peace. He's made us one. How? Notice this very specific language at the back half of verse 14.

He broke down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. He made a new community, a new humanity. And here's the language, in his flesh broke down the dividing wall of hostility.

Now what Paul is saying there is that the way the cross deals with hostility between people groups, between people is that very literally Jesus Christ became the hostility.

[22:22] It says he in his flesh became the dividing wall. He took it on. He's saying that when Jesus went to the cross, he bore every single bit of resentment that we've ever had for other people.

When Jesus went to the cross, he bore every bit of unrighteous anger, every bit of hostility, every bit of hatred, every bit of inner heart eye rolling at other communities, every bit of looking down the nose, every bit of self-righteousness and pride.

Look it's saying Jesus actually became that. He became the hostility. How so? First Corinthians 5. He who knew no sin became that sin for our sakes so that we might in him become righteous.

He's saying that very objectively in the eyes of God the Father, God the Father put every single act of resentment, hostility, anger, hatred that we've ever bore in our lives, that we've ever committed right onto him legally, that he objectively became that so that in his death that hostility might die with

him and justice might be established.

Psalms 85 verse 10, in the Messiah justice and peace will kiss. Jesus Christ became the injustice of our hostility so that for us justice and peace would kiss.

[23 : 52] We would receive justice objectively before the Father, access to God and then we could have peace with one another. In other words, what he's saying is that when Jesus became hostility for us, we became people at peace with God the Father so we could be at peace with one another.

It's objective so that it can become subjective. And so lastly, how can it become subjective in your life? How can we grow? And this is really just a preview of next week.

Come back next week because we don't have time today to say really the main point he's making which is the great example of the gospel's power of bringing people together is the church.

And we'll focus on that next week but let's just think of two ways we can see that today. This week, Monday, as you go forward, he says down in verse 15, he has created in himself one new man, one new humanity.

And he's brought us together. He's created a new humanity and he's talking here about the church. Two ways. He says first, how can you grow in your life if you're a Christian in peace with people?

[25 : 02] And what he tells us here is he says, the gospel comes into your life and it stops every single one of us. It stops us. It must stop us from boasting.

So Ephesians 2 verse 10, verse 8, 9 and 10, he said, when you see the gospel, the power of the gospel come into your life, you know that it's not by merit that you were ever accepted.

It's not by self-righteousness. You have nothing to boast in. He says the way to kill hostility in your life towards other people is to see, is to say, I've got nothing to boast in.

I cannot have any self-righteousness before God and other people. In other words, he's saying, do you realize, are you able today to say, but for the grace of God, who would I be?

When I look down and I see other people in my heart, you know, I want to look down my nose. He said, but can you say, but for the grace of God, who would I be?

[25 : 58] Is there anything in my life that I haven't received as a gift? Everything good in my life has come to me as a gift. You know, if you were born here or there, if you were born somewhere else, if you were born into a different time in a family, who would you be?

And he said, do you have nothing to boast about? And he's saying, the gospel kills our boasting.

And when our boasting dies, our self-righteousness dies. And when our self-righteousness dies, our hostility dies.

And so in other words, you can call sin, sin. You can look at a community or culture and say, there are sinful practices here, perhaps, but never hold a people in derision at the very same time because of the power of the gospel.

Now, the second thing, the final thing is this. The second thing in the final thing is the necessity of the church, the reality of the church. He says here that when we realize the gospel, we realize that we've been made one new man, we've been made part of the community of the faithful, the church. You've become the church. We are the church together, gathered standing before God with access to God. And so he says in verse 15, we are, quote, his body.

[27 : 10] If you have reconciliation to God the Father today, you have legally, objectively obtained reconciliation to every single Christian that's ever existed. You see, it's a legal thing.

In Jesus, when he died, holding our hostility in himself, we were legally granted access to God the Father. And he's saying, now we've been legally made one with each other.

And so whether we like it or not, we are one new humanity in Jesus, shoulder to shoulder, with every other Christian that's ever existed, every people group, every race, every ethnicity, we are very legally before God the Father won.

Now one thing to take away and we'll pray. If you're a Christian today, that means for all of us, we don't get to have a casual relationship to God's church.

He's saying to us, you are the reconciled community of faith, no matter what you think about it, no matter how you feel about it, no matter how much we want to sleep in on Sundays.

[28 : 16] We are the reconciled community. We stand as one new humanity, legally bound to Christ before God the Father, and it'll be that way forever. And so he's telling us here, we don't get to have a casual relationship to the church.

It's a relationship of necessity. It's actually who we've become. And so one old Scottish theologian, he puts it like this, John Mackay, he says, you are the church that is your socially defining attribute.

If you are a Christian, that is your socially defining attribute. And so he says, we can no longer say separate by male, female, Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, skivvy and slave, free man, as Paul puts it.

But in Christ, we are all in all. We're all together. We're all one. So John Mackay says, friends, that's more fundamental. That's more important than any other identity.

That's more important than nationality. So English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, American, German, it's all second.

[29 : 24] That's all second. Christian is first. Janitor, lawyer, doctor, teacher, university professor, student, unemployed, it's all second.

Your fundamental core identity is the church, Christian, one with Christ, legally, subjectively, objectively. And so one pastor writes, can the surpassing power of God come into your life and change your life only individually and not corporately?

Can the surpassing power of God come into your life and flow through your life if you're not willing to become deeply grafted into the community of faith, love, truth and mission?

Can the power of God, according to the Bible, work through your life only as an individual and not as part of a new group that you get involved with, the church? And the answer of the Bible is absolutely not.

Absolutely not. The power of the gospel come into your life and you not bed down into the life of the church. And the Bible says absolutely not. It says that we are the church and we have to be.

[30 : 33] It's a necessity. The church is objective reality, reconciled community. God has made peace between us and the Father.

The Lord Jesus has made peace by the cross. And so we must, we have to have peace with one another. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for the peace that we've been offered in Christ by the blood of the cross.

And we pray now that you would help us to put away derision, not an eye to saying, to calling sins in, but hostility towards others.

Lord, we ask that anywhere that there is not truth and love that you would kill that, you would crush that this morning. Show us in our hearts, show us in our lives in the ways that we remain hostile to people in our hearts.

And we ask Father that we would be motivated by the power of the cross above all else to seek love, truth, harmony, justice and peace with one another. And we pray this in Christ's name.

[31 : 34] Amen.