

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON TWENTY-SEVEN)

“RECONCILED TO GOD AND EACH OTHER”

EPHESIANS 2:11-22 (NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh — who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed on the body by human hands —

12 that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility,

15 when he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace,

16 and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed.

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near,

18 so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household,

20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Since we commenced our examination of the second half of **Ephesians 2**, we have noted that the Apostle Paul focuses in this section on the work of Christ for the Gentiles in particular, and on the reconciliation of the Gentiles and Jews in their union with Christ. It was his desire for the Jewish and Gentile believers in Ephesus, and the rest of Asia Minor, to live together in love and unity. According to New Testament scholar **Daniel Wallace**, the theme of the letter may be stated pragmatically in the following way: “Christians, get along with each other! Maintain the unity which Christ has effected positionally by his death in a practical manner.” In light of the fact that the majority of the members of the Ephesian church were Gentiles, Paul addresses them in particular, in this section of his letter.

In verses **11-12**, Paul emphasizes the wretchedness of their condition prior to their conversion, in order to magnify the wonder of God's grace: *"Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh — who are called 'uncircumcision' by the so-called 'circumcision' that is performed on the body by human hands — that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."*

In these verses, he lists five things that were true of the Gentiles before the grace of God intervened in their lives. They were without Christ, without citizenship, without covenants, without hope, and without God.

In verse **13**, he indicates that the gracious intervention of God had wrought a wonderful change in the lives of these Gentiles: *"But now in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."*

In verses **11** and **12**, Paul uses the words *"formerly"* and *"at that time"* in speaking of the state of the Gentile Christians before they were saved. The words *"but now"* in verse **13** are in direct contrast with these words. The Gentiles who *"used to be far away have been brought near."* They have been brought near *"by the blood of Christ."* The death of Jesus Christ on the cross as a sacrifice, is the means by which the Gentiles have been brought near. At the cross, both the Jews and the Gentiles were reconciled to God and to each other.

In verses **14-15**, Paul continues with this thought. He writes, *"For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility, when he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace."*

Jesus Christ Himself is our peace. He alone, in His person, accomplished what the law with all its ordinances and sacrifices could not do. He brought about peace by means of His voluntary sacrifice. The Jews and the Gentiles had been separated by God's act of selecting the Jewish nation to be the channel through which He would bring salvation to the lost. Now, in the blood of Christ they have been joined together in one body — the Church.

When Paul speaks about this *"middle wall of partition,"* there may be an allusion to the barricade which in Jerusalem separated the court of the Gentiles from the temple itself. But the allusion to that literal barricade is only by way of illustration. What he was actually speaking of was something far more serious and dreadful than a barricade. He was really referring to the chronic, deep-seated hostility that existed between the two groups. The divine ordinances given by God to Israel stood as a wall between Jews and the Gentiles, because it made a definite distinction between them. Jesus Christ destroyed this *"middle wall of partition"* when He abolished the law by His death on the Cross. *"In His flesh,"* that is, in His crucified body, Christ abolished the law.

By fulfilling the demands of the Law in His righteous life, and by bearing the curse of the Law in His sacrificial death, Jesus removed the legal barrier that separated the Jews from the Gentiles.

Paul informs us that our Lord *"did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace."* Christ has not simply made one man where formerly there were two, but He has made one **new** man! In **Genesis 3:15**, Christ is identified as the *"seed"* or the descendant of the woman. In **Galatians 3:16**, Paul refers to Him as the *"seed"* or the descendant of Abraham. Since Christ is both *"the seed of the woman"* and *"the seed of Abraham"*, it is not surprising that in him both Jew and Gentile meet so as to become *"one new man."* Something entirely new has been created. The old distinctions between Jew and Gentile have been lost in a new man — the **"in Christ"** man. The Greek word translated *"new"* does not refer to that which is new in the sense of time, but rather to that which is new in quality.

The Gospel speaks to the Gentile, as well as to the Jew, indeed it speaks to all races and all classes and says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31)*, meaning, *“Nothing less than this is required of you, but also **nothing more.**”* The dividing wall, which for so long had been a hostile barrier between Jew and Gentile, came crashing down. It was in that way that Christ, by his atonement, made peace.

In verse **16**, Paul continues and expands his explanation of the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice whereby, He abolished in Himself the Law of commandments in ordinances. He says, *“and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed.”*

In this verse, Paul refers not only to the reconciliation between the Jews and the Gentiles, but also to a reconciliation that is even more fundamental, namely, the reconciliation between lost humanity and God. In the context of the idea of the reconciliation of the Jews and the Gentiles, Paul introduces the larger idea of the reconciliation of both groups to God. Paul wants for both the believing Jews and the believing Gentiles to understand that while it is true that they had been in a state of enmity with each other, the larger and more basic truth is that both groups had been alienated from God! Indeed, it was because of their alienation from God why they were at enmity with each other!

The word *“reconcile”* is the translation of a Greek word which means, *“to bring together again those that are at variance.”* God and sinners, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, are at variance because of sin. Sin has made them the enemies of God. As a result of their being at variance with God, they are at variance with each other. The reason why there is so much enmity and hostility in the world, between individuals, families, political groups, and nations is that the contending parties are at enmity with God. They have not found each other at Calvary. Only when sinners have been reconciled to God through the Cross, will they be truly reconciled to each other. This is why the unity of the believers is so important! The world needs to witness, in the Church, a demonstration of the reality of the breaking down of every barrier that divides one individual from another. We must become *“living epistles”* of the power of God to reconcile those who were once at enmity with Him and consequently at enmity with each other. In other words, we must *“adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Titus 2:10, King James Version)*. For a world torn by strife and division, the gospel is the only answer!

The *“enmity”* referred to in verse **15**, is the enmity that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. The *“enmity”* referred to in verse **16**, is that between the sinner and God. God’s purpose and plan was to bring the Jews and the Gentiles into a right relationship with Himself and each other by the Cross of Christ. On Calvary, He put to death the enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles by putting to death the enmity between both groups and Himself. In this way, He reconciled both groups in one body to Himself and each other.

Christ’s atoning death achieved its purpose. By grace both groups, having heard and accepted the gospel, had laid aside their wicked alienation from God and had entered into the blessings of Christ’s perfect atonement. The miracle of Calvary is wonderful indeed for through the instrument of the Cross, Jesus Christ not only reconciled to God both Jews and Gentiles but also slew the deeply-rooted hostility that had existed for so long a time between the two groups.

The idea of peace between God and man, and consequently also between man and man, as a result of the sacrifice of our Lord on the Cross, is continued in verses **17-18**: *“And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”*

Paul is informing us in these verses that Jesus Christ was not satisfied with reconciling the Jews and the Gentiles to God and to each other by His substitutionary death on the Cross.

He wanted them to know about it! He wanted them to experience in their hearts, the assurance that they now enjoy peace with God and with each other, because God has nothing against them. This involves at least three things:

1. That God has fully judged sin, upon Christ, who was their substitute.
2. That God was so completely satisfied with Christ's sacrifice that He will remain satisfied for eternity. He will, therefore, never take up the judgment of their sin again.
3. That God is absolutely at rest about them forever, even though their understanding of truth may be poor, and even though their walk with Him might be faltering at times. God is concentrating on the blood of Christ, not on their sins. Every claim against them was met when God through Christ reconciled "*all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross — through him, whether things on earth or things in heaven*" (**Colossians 1:20**). All the majesty of God's holy and righteous throne was satisfied when our Lord said, "*It is finished!*"

The peace of which Paul speaks here is not a feeling, but an objective fact. We have peace with God! It is a peace outside of ourselves. Billions are striving for inward peace, but their striving is futile because they are not resting where God is resting. And where is God resting? Where else but in the finished work of Christ on Calvary.

Horatius Bonar, the Scottish churchman, poet and hymn-writer, wrote the words of the following hymn, "***I Hear the Words of Love,***" which speak eloquently and powerfully about the peace that is ours because of the finished work of Calvary:

*I hear the words of love,
I gaze upon the blood,
I see the mighty sacrifice,
And I have peace with God.*

*'Tis everlasting peace!
Sure as Jehovah's name,
'Tis stable as His steadfast throne,
For evermore the same.*

*The clouds may go and come,
And storms may sweep my sky;
This blood-sealed friendship changes not,
The cross is ever nigh.*

*My love is oftentimes low,
My joy still ebbs and flows;
But peace with Him remains the same,
No change Jehovah knows.*

*I change, He changes not,
The Christ can never die;
His love, not mine, the resting place,
His truth, not mine, the tie.*

*And yonder is my peace,
The grave of all my woes!
I know the Son of God has come,
I know He died and rose.*

*I know He liveth now,
At God's right hand above,
I know the throne on which He sits,
I know His truth and love.*

Paul says that our Lord “*came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.*” This “coming” and “preaching” is probably a reference to all of Christ’s work on earth which He performed Himself, during His earthly ministry and perhaps, that which He continued to accomplish by means of the apostles and others. That it was peace which He not only brought about but which He also proclaimed is evident from the following passages:

JOHN 14:27

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be distressed or lacking in courage.”

JOHN 16:33

“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage — I have conquered the world.”

JOHN 20:19-21

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the disciples had gathered together and locked the doors of the place because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. Just as the Father has sent me, I also send you.’”

This proclamation of peace is also implied in such beautiful texts as **Matthew 9:10-13**; **Luke 19:1-10**; and **1 Timothy 1:12-17**.

Our Lord came and preached peace “*to you who were far off*” (the Gentiles), and “*to those who were near*” (the Jews). In **John 10:16**, He indicated that His saving work would include those “*who were far off*” when He said, “*I have other sheep that do not come from this sheepfold. I must bring them too, and they will listen to my voice, so that there will be one flock and one shepherd.*”

Paul then, explains that the fact that both groups have been brought to God through Christ, is a witness to the truth that Christ came and preached peace to both of them. He says in effect, “We know that both the Jews and the Gentiles have obtained this peace through Christ’s suffering on the cross because “*through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*” It is through Jesus Christ, and Him alone — that is, through the shedding of His **blood** (verse **13**), the sacrifice of His **flesh** (verse **15**), the curse borne by Him on the **cross** (verse **16**) — that access to the Father was made possible and real. There was and there is no other way.

The word “access” is the translation of the Greek word **prosagógé**, (**pros-ag-ogue-ay**’), which means “to open a way of access.” It was used of those who secure for a person, the privilege of an interview with a sovereign. We may define “access” as it is used by Paul in his epistles as “**freedom of approach to the Father, in the confidence that we have found never-ending favour with Him.**”

“Access” has to do with the special status of those who can enter into the innermost dwelling place of the sovereign God. Both Jewish and Gentile believers can now, as a result of Christ’s work, walk together as one humanity into the very presence of God.

The same sequence of peace and access is found in **Romans 5:1-2**: *“Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained **access** into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of God’s glory.”*

It is by means of the ministry of the Holy Spirit that the saints have access into the presence of God. The in-dwelling Spirit opens the access door into God’s immediate presence.

