

“Peace ... Real Peace”

Ephesians 2:11-22

Series: Ephesians [#08]

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Theme: **Jesus Christ Is Our Peace.**

Introduction

The first 3 chapters of Ephesians lay a foundation of who we are as believers—who we are in Jesus Christ. In chapter 1 Paul tells us that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, and details some of them. Then he describes some of the good things that God wants for us.

In chapter 2 he starts by stating that it takes a miracle to rescue us from sin and bring us into fellowship with God. We were spiritually dead; we were dominated by and enslaved to sin; we were condemned in our sin. But God in His love by His grace and mercy provided the miracle to rescue us in Jesus Christ.

Today, as we come to verses 11-22, Paul continues with this foundation of who we are in Christ. All believers are one body—united in Christ to share fellowship and service. Again he sketches contrasts—the *before* and *after*; before and after we placed our faith in Jesus Christ. Verse 12, “You were.” Verse 13, “But now.” Just as in 2:1, “You were.” Verse 4, “But God.”

He sketches the contrasts in our relationship with God, and with other people. He used the obvious division among people of the first century church—Jews and Gentiles. Paul outlines the alienation from God that is true of all without Christ, and some of the differences and alienation that existed between the two groups.

The major contrast in this section is between alienation and peace. The central lesson is that *Jesus Christ is our peace*. We start with the “before,” with our pervasive lack of peace.

Our Pervasive Lack Of Peace.

Where there is alienation, there is no true peace. Alienation occurs when there is a breakdown in a relationship, as unity and harmony are lost. Alienation brings with it ...

- disappointment and sadness;
- pain and frustration;
- anger and despair.

Alienation does not respect age or class. A research article states, “...many teachers ... know that we have aliens in our schools and classrooms. They come in a variety of forms. Some sit and stare at us, giving the feeling that they are looking right through you. Other aliens climb the walls, throw abuse, disrupt our lessons, and when it all gets too much they leave, sometimes for a while, sometimes disappearing from our schools forever. ...these

aliens are not from outer space, they are from the neighbourhood, and they are not really aliens, just young people, alienated from a system that is intended to educate them.”

[Oerlemans & Jenkins]

The alienation between people and God is the most profound. It is the most profound because God is our creator. And, He created us to live in a close, loving, fulfilling relationship with Him. This is at the core of who and what we are. So then, being alienated from God is by far the greatest, most profound and most devastating alienation.

We try to cure it, or at least cope with it, with religion or acceptance and achievement. But, of course, that doesn't work. It doesn't work because on our own we are alienated from God. In rapid-fire action, Paul piles up five sharp descriptions of this reality, in verse 12. First, they were “separate[d] from Christ.” Christ is the New Testament term for Messiah. The One God promised who would come and provide the full salvation and peace people longed for. What a promise! What a hope! *But*, this promise was given to Israel, to the Jewish people, not the Gentiles. The Messiah would come through Israel. Gentiles made up the majority of the church in Ephesus. Paul reminds them that “before Christ” they had no connection to the Messiah.

Second, they were “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.” They were not Israelites. The only way to God for Gentiles before the church age was through Israel. People who sought God could, and did come and become one of the people of Israel. That is how they had to come to God.

This flows into the third description of their alienation from God here in verse 12. They were “strangers to the covenants of promise.” God chose Israel. He made it a nation. His covenants, or His agreements of promise were with Israel. God's design was to bless the nations through Israel, but His covenants were given to Israel. They were strangers to the covenants of promise.

Next, they had no hope. They, and we, were people “having no hope.” Hope looks beyond the moment. Hope is certainty in something or someone for the future. The Ephesians, like the rest of the world, often looked to religion for hope—and there was a great wealth of religion in Ephesus in the first century. “Before Christ” they had made-made religions, but no real hope, just as it is with people in our world today.

Finally, they, and we, were “without God in the world.” The Ephesians had a full slate of gods and goddesses. They had the splendid temple of Diana. But again, all of this was man-made. They did not know, they did not have a relationship with the one true God, their Creator.

That certainly is enough to paint the picture of alienation from God. But Paul adds more brushstrokes. Note two phrases:

- “far off” ... far off from God (13); and,
- “strangers and aliens” ... strangers and aliens with respect to God (19).

Clearly, before Christ they were “alienated from God,” just as every person is today who has not come to faith in Christ.

In addition to being alienated from God, they were alienated from each other. Verses 11-12 show not only the differences between Jews and Gentiles, but also their alienation. Verse 14 speaks of “the dividing wall” between them. Paul used “the dividing wall” to picture all the extensive and hostile separation and alienation between Jews and Gentiles. Yes, there were God-directed distinctions between Jews and Gentiles. We have already noted the nation, citizenship and covenants of promise. Verse 11 speaks of circumcision. While the Jews were not the only ones to practice circumcision, this physical sign marked them as different, as God’s people.

God’s intent for these distinctions had several purposes. First, to call, mark and keep the people true to Him. In Leviticus 20:26 God said, “Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.” One specific example was God’s instruction for the Jews not to marry Gentiles. In Deuteronomy 7:3-4, God directs

“...you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods...”

This was part of calling, marking and keeping the people as His, to be true to Him.

Secondly, the God-given distinctions were so Israel would be a light, a clear testimony to God, drawing others to Him. In God’s covenant with Abraham He said “...in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). When God renewed His covenant with Moses, in Exodus 34 (10 f.), He said He would work so “all the people among whom you live will see the working of the LORD.” Then to Moses and the people, “Be sure to observe what I am commanding you.” The people often recognized this purpose. Psalm 67 opens, with the prayer, “God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us that Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations” (1-2).

The alienation between Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 2 was in no way unique—then or today. One writer comments, “For people as technologically advanced as we are, we certainly haven’t learned much morally. While we can put men on the moon, we can’t seem to cause them to get along together. Heart transplants are common place, but hearts of compassion are growing increasingly rare. Instead of tearing down the walls of hostility between us, we have been erecting them with care.”

[<http://horizonsnet.org/sermons/eph09.html>]

There certainly is alienation between Jews and Arabs today. Also, alienation between different factions of Jews and alienation between different factions of Arabs, etc. ... Caste systems exist—whether legally instituted or not. Racial, ethnic, cultural divisions and alienation are everywhere. Then there is the multiplicity of religious divisions and conflict.

This is our natural condition. While it is better in some places and worse in others, it is pervasive, it is everywhere. And it is not something we will or can eradicate on our own, even with our best and most diligent efforts.

Alienation pervades all of our life—life with God and with others. And, where there is Alienation, there is no peace. That's the "Before." Now, Let's go to the "After," to being "in Christ."

God's Provision Of Perfect Peace.

Jesus Christ is our peace. Peace that brings wholeness, harmony, assurance; peace that brings us together with God and others. He brings peace between God and us. Because of our sinfulness and sin, we were "far off" from God (13); we were "strangers and aliens" from God (19). In the Old Testament, Isaiah 59:2 we read, "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."

In Christ we are moved from being far away, estranged, distant, to being near God. Verse 13 tells us, "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Then in verse 17 Paul cites God's promise of Isaiah 57:19, "... 'Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near,' says the LORD, 'and I will heal him.'" Christ accomplished this through His blood, His death and resurrection. We find in verse 16 that He "reconciled them both [Jews and Gentiles] in one body to God through the cross, by having put to death the enmity [or, hostility]." And then, through the Holy Spirit, we see in verse 18, we have access to God the Father.

This is the reconciliation we need! The reconciliation which removes our alienation to God. Reconciliation which brings us peace—peace with God and also God's perfect peace within. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27). Paul wrote to the believers at Rome, "...having been justified by faith, *we have peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1).

It is first peace established with God, then peace experienced within. Believers don't always feel at peace with God. Sometimes it is because there is sin that we are not facing, haven't turned from. God is convicting us. At other times, we may doubt that God really has forgiven us. Remember 1 John 1:9 is for believers—"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Then we also need to remember that Satan and his forces will constantly accuse us. We need to stand firm—chapter 6 deals with this *spiritual warfare*.

Also, remember the positive, pro-active words from Philippians 4,

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your

requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (4:4-9)

Peace ... real peace with God.

Then there is peace between each other. The dividing wall between Jews and Greeks, between any and every different peoples, is demolished in Christ.

“For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace.” (14-15)

Christ broke down the wall. Paul is not talking about the walls in the Jewish temple—but it serves as a good example. The temple’s imagery was focused on God—His holiness, righteousness, judgment, and mercy. Herod’s temple followed the original pattern, but elaborated on a grand scale. The divisions, the walls of separation were pronounced.

- Gentile seekers were on the lowest level, 19 steps below the Jewish women;
- and 34 steps down from the courts of the men and priests;
- 46 steps below and out of view of the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies beyond it.

Christ smashed, obliterated all the walls between people.

In Christ everyone comes to God on equal footing. So now,

- we are “fellow citizens” (19);
- we all are members “of God’s household” (19);
- we are together growing as a dwelling of God in the Holy Spirit (22), a holy temple (21).

We know we don’t always live out and experience this truth. Differences tend to divide people. Different races, cultures, languages, personalities, political views, doctrinal views. We naturally note differences between ourselves and others. Those differences lead to prejudice. And prejudice leads to discrimination. This *is* the natural flow because of our self-centered, sinful nature. When we get to chapter 4 we will see that our differences should not divide us, but draw us together.

Now, this does *not* mean that there should be only one organized group of churches in

the world; nor does it mean that we should reduce our view of Biblical truth to the lowest common denominator to *keep peace*. Nor yet does it mean that every believer and church, even in the same tradition, should be a *cookie-cutter* image of each other. It *does* mean that we need to ...

- always be on guard for self-centeredness and pride;
- that we should always see every other believer as not only equally valuable to God, but also to us;
- that we should always be looking for ways to learn from all other believers, more than to *inform*, or correct them.

In Christ we have “Peace ... Real Peace” with each other. We have that peace because Jesus Christ is our peace.

Conclusion.

If you are a believer, God has made peace for you with Himself in and through Jesus Christ. No matter what your life was like before you came to Christ, never forget that you had *no* peace with God. Always remember and thank Him that Jesus Christ is your Peace—and all this brings to you.

God has made peace for you with other believers. Your self-centeredness and pride doesn’t change that. Nor does any one else’s. God has given you *peace... real peace*—it is yours. That is an objective fact.

Now, living in His peace, enjoying the wholeness and harmony, is up to you. You can choose to live in and with God’s peace, regardless of the circumstances and people in your life. An elderly woman, who is now home with God in heaven, was a beautiful picture of this. She had great pain for many years. One day a friend asked her, “Do you suffer much?” She said “Yes,” and then pointing to her hand continued, “but there is no nail here.” Then pointing to her head, she said, “There are no thorns here. He had the thorns, I have the *peace*.” Now pointing to her side, she said, “There is no spear here. He had the spear. I have the *peace*.”

In the next quiet moments with God, thank Him that Jesus Christ is *your* peace. Determine to face every circumstance and person, each sin, all the attacks of Satan’s forces in light of God’s truth and provisions for you. Determine to live each day with a Philippians 4 focus.

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