

Peace in our time

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let us turn to a reading for today, which you will find in Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 2, in page 976 of the Pew Bible, Ephesians chapter 2.

We have for these last four weeks been working through one of the richest chapters in the New Testament, Ephesians chapter 2. Over these four weeks, we've split chapter 2 into four, and this is a last of four.

We're going to pick up today in verse 11 of chapter 2 and read through to the end of the chapter. So then let us hear the Word of God.

Therefore, remember, remember that at one time, you Gentiles in the flesh, called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[1 : 1 6] But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body, and through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And he, that is Jesus, Jesus came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together, into a dwelling place, for God, by the Spirit. Amen.

And may God add his blessing to this, the reading of his word. Now just a short prayer. Father, Father, we thank you for your word to the Bible.

[2 : 5 3] We thank you for the power of your word. The power of your word that can take those who are dead, disobedient, and doomed, and make us alive in Christ Jesus.

The power of your word that can take those who are divided, and make them one in Christ Jesus. As we gather this lunchtime hour, as our great conviction in the power of your word, the power of your word that can help us to be joined together, and to grow into a holy temple in the Lord.

And so, Father, as we gather this lunchtime service, we ask that your word would indeed accomplish all the purposes for which you have purposed it.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Last week marked the 70th anniversary of VE Day, Victory in Europe Day, bringing to an end some six years of horrendous conflict of the Second World War in Europe.

In September 1938, before the Second World War began, some of you may remember the words spoken by the then British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, when he had returned from conferences in Germany.

[4 : 18] Peace in our time, he cried. Peace with honor. However, Chamberlain was absolutely sure that he had stopped Adolf Hitler. Yet one year later, Hitler invaded Poland.

And on the 3rd of September 1939, Great Britain declared war in Germany. Chamberlain's great peace mission had failed. Peace in our time is what the Apostle Paul is saying in our verses today.

Peace in our time is possible. Peace in our time is happening. Because unlike Neville Chamberlain, Christ Jesus' peace mission did not fail.

In fact, verse 14, He himself is our peace. If you gaze your eyes over verses 13 to 17, you will notice that the dominating word is peace.

The dominating theme is peace. Verse 14, For he that is Christ, he himself is our peace. Verse 15, Jesus himself creating in himself one new man in place of the two.

[5 : 31] So making peace. And we have it twice in verse 17. And he came, that is Jesus Christ came, and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near.

And we have also outlined for us in these verses, what this peace achieves, what this peace actually accomplishes. It brings near those who were far off.

Verse 13, It breaks down the dividing wall of hostility. Verse 14, It creates one new man out of the two.

Verse 15, And reconciles them both to God, and kills the hostility. Verse 16, Peace, and the consequences of this peace, are all through these verses, like the word blackpool through a stick of rock.

But what is this peace? What has achieved this peace? And who are the beneficiaries of this peace? Well, we've been working our way through chapter 2 of this letter to the Ephesians.

[6 : 41] One of the richest chapters in the New Testament. Ephesians, we have discovered, is all about the church. God's new humanity in Christ. It is the gospel of the church.

The letter divides into three sections. The wealth of the church, chapter 1, verse 1, to chapter 3, verse 21. The walk of the church, chapter 4, verse 1, to chapter 6, verse 9.

And the warfare of the church, chapter 6, verse 10, to the end of the letter. And we are still very much in that first section of the letter, the wealth of the church.

In chapter 1, Paul has outlined the spiritual privileges of the church in Christ. The past privilege, the blessing of election in Christ Jesus. Chapter 1, verse 4 to 6.

Before the foundation of the world, before creation, before time existed, to when only God himself existed, God did something.

[7 : 42] He chose us in Christ. Totally undeserving as we are, He chose us that we should be holy and blameless before Him. The past blessing of election, but also the present privilege of adoption.

Verse 5 to 8 of chapter 1. God has adopted us as His children through Jesus Christ. And through Jesus Christ, we have been redeemed through His blood. We have been forgiven according to the riches of His grace, which He has lavished upon us.

There is also the future privilege of unification. Verse 9 and 10 of chapter 1. God has made known to us the mystery of His will for the future.

His plan, His purpose, which He has set forth in Christ Jesus. A plan for the fullness of time to unite all things. All things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on the earth.

And we also have spelled out for us the scope of this unification. It's outlined there in verses 11 to 14. That these privileges, these blessings, belong equally to Jewish believers and to Gentile believers, non-Jewish believers.

[9 : 02] And this theme is picked up in our verses today. Having outlined our spiritual privileges in Christ, Paul now in chapter 2 goes on to outline our spiritual position in Christ.

As we have seen in previous weeks, chapter 2 falls into two halves. Two halves that outline two great realities that God has accomplished for His people, His church, His new humanity in Christ.

In verses 1 to 10 of chapter 2, the first three verses highlight the plight of men, humanity's dreadful and desperate condition. Dead, disobedient, and doomed.

Under the curse of God due to our sin and awaiting His judgment and punishment. In verse 4 to 10, but God, who is rich in love and mercy, showed His great power by making alive in Christ those who were dead.

The grave clothes of sin have now been replaced by the grace clothes of Christ. In verse 11 to 22, God has made one in Christ those who were divided, Jew and Gentile together, making one new people of God.

[10 : 21] And we began to consider these verses last week. And to be honest, Jew and Gentile together making one new people of God is not an outcome that looked possible at all.

Paul, Paul in the first 10 verses of chapter 2 discussed the salvation of sinners in general. But we saw that Paul in verses 11 to 22 turns his attention to the work of Christ for Gentiles.

We saw that Paul began to highlight what life was like, what happened, and what life is like now for the Gentiles. And this could be summed up in three words.

Alienation, reconciliation, and unification. And so last time in verses 11 to 12, we considered the Gentiles' terrible plight, alienation.

The Gentiles' terrible plight, alienation. Paul in these verses commands them twice to remember, to remember their terrible plight, that they were alienated.

[11 : 27] And we saw that Paul does this not to put them down, no, he does this because he knows that if they fail to grasp the awfulness of life outside of Christ, then they would never grasp and enjoy how privileged they were in Christ.

Look at verse 11 and 12. Paul tells them to remember that they were separate, alienated, and strangers to all God's covenant promises.

As we consider these verses last week, we saw that they were without Christ, without citizenship in Israel, without covenants, without hope, and without God.

They were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and godless. it was a very sobering assessment for all Gentiles, the Ephesians, and us.

A sobering assessment of our terrible plight, being alienated from God, and everything that was spiritually good. And as we think about what we've looked at in verses 1 to 3 of chapter 2 and verse 11 and 12 of chapter 2, only then will what's written in chapter 2, verse 8 be meaningful.

[12 : 48] By grace, you have been saved. The only reason our terrible plight changed is through what Christ done for us at Calvary, which is what Paul says in chapter 2, verse 13.

But now, but now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near. How have we been brought near?

By trying our best? By being good? By coming to church? Being baptized? By being evangelicals and holding to the right confessions?

No. We have been brought near to God, into His covenant community, where we can enjoy all His covenant promises through the blood of Jesus.

Paul wants us to see that it cost Jesus everything for us to receive everything. He gave His life so that by His death we might have life.

[13 : 54] Paul has already mentioned in verse 7 of chapter 1, he's already mentioned Jesus' blood saying, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. without the blood of Jesus poured out for us on the cross, without Him dying in our place, we have no hope.

We stand unforgiven before a holy and just God. However, when we claim the blood of Christ, when we look to the cross and recognize that what Jesus did was on behalf of my sins, and this is my only defense before God, when we do this, we can draw near to God.

Look what Paul says in verse 12 of chapter 3, through Christ, we have boldness and access to God with confidence through our faith in Him. In Christ Jesus, we who were once far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

And as Paul goes on moving from looking at the Gentiles' terrible plight, alienation, he now moves to the gospel's transforming power. The gospel's transforming power.

The gospel has achieved reconciliation for those who knew nothing but alienation. And Paul writes that God's purpose in all of this was to bring about peace.

[15 : 18] Our peace is not found in a signed document. It's not won by politicians. Our peace is found in a person, Christ Jesus. He Himself is our peace.

And there are two strands to the peace that Christ Jesus brings. First of all, He makes peace through Christ's cross between Himself and us. Romans chapter 5 verse 1 says this, Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 16, Jesus might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility, creating peace.

However, Paul's emphasis in Ephesians chapter 2 isn't only about peace between God and man through the cross. His emphasis here is peace between Jew and Gentile, also brought about by Christ's death and the cross.

Jesus Himself is our peace, we are told in verse 14. But one of the main purposes of this peace was to make us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile.

[16 : 40] Paul, Christ's purpose in dying, verse 15, was that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace. And this is an astonishing statement when we think of the hatred that existed between Jew and Gentile in the first century world.

I wonder if we're aware how much Jews hated Gentiles. Here are some examples. Many Jews believed that God only created Gentiles for one purpose, as fuel for the fires of hell.

Other records tell us that if a Gentile woman was in labor, Jews were taught not to eat her, as they would only help bringing another heathen dog into the world.

And this hatred was not one way. We only need to read recent history to discover how much Gentiles hate Jews. The Holocaust.

Recently, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Jews' liberation from the death camp that is Auschwitz. And this hatred toward Jews is not something confined only to the past.

[17 : 49] Recent records this year informed us that anti-Semitic attacks in Great Britain have doubled in the past year. There have always been astonishing levels of hatred between both groups.

But then Jesus comes along and gives up his life, not just for Jew and not just for Gentile, but for sinners. sinners. And the result is Jewish sinners and Gentile sinners, both of whom, verse 17 says, need peace preached to them.

The two become one body, the body of Christ. And we are told in verse 18, both have access through Jesus to the Father by one spirit. Only through Jesus, who, verse 15 says, in his flesh, has abolished the law of commandments and ordinances.

Only through Jesus can Jew and Gentile be reconciled to one another. But more importantly, only through Jesus, as we are told in verse 16, can Jew and Gentile be reconciled to God.

That's wonderful news for the Ephesians, who were far off and have now been brought near. But for a Jew, for a Jew it would have been quite hard to stomach, quite hard to get your head around.

[19 : 10] Paul has said of the Ephesians that they were without Christ, without citizenship, without covenants, without hope, and without God. But the Jews, listen to what Paul writes about the Jews in Romans chapter 9.

They are Israelites and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises.

To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, comes the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.

Amen. The Jews were people of great privilege, but the fulfillment of all these privileges was Christ. All these great privileges were merely shadowing Christ, pointing forth unto him.

Jews, and Jews, just like Gentiles, needed Christ. There would be no two-tier Christianity. Christ has reconciled both to God and one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

[20 : 21] And through him we both, or we all, have access in one spirit to the Father. God now, I don't think that we have Jews and Gentiles here this afternoon.

I think we're all probably Gentiles. But there are some of us here who've had extremely privileged upbringings, just like the Jews.

We may have been raised with Christian parents. We have been brought along to church all of our lives. We have sat under the faithful teaching and preaching of the gospel.

the way for you to be part of God's family is exactly the same way as maybe the atheist who drops in off the street. Maybe the same as the unchurched drug addict who attends some of my recovery groups.

Or maybe like some of our Iranian brothers who's come here from a Muslim background. The way is the same for all through Christ.

[21 : 27] Jesus Christ is a great leveler for all men. And Paul wants the Ephesians to remember these things. He's telling them at one time as Gentiles, they had a terrible plight, alienation.

But all this changed because of the gospel's transforming power, bringing reconciliation for them in Christ. Having outlined these things, Paul now ends chapter 2 in verses 19 to 22, by pointing to God's tremendous purpose, unification.

God's tremendous purpose, unification. C.S. Lewis once said that the church was not a show home, but a building site. And these verses at the end of chapter 2 would back up what Lewis said.

We've had a building work of our own that's just been completed here in the church. And for us having an architect like one of our church members, Kenny Stephen, on the job with his plans and drawings and fine eye for detail, have been a tremendous benefit in making one building out of the two.

But God's plans and purposes of unification are even more tremendous. Look back to verse 12. The Gentiles were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and godless.

[22 : 52] But look at the building work that has been going on amongst them. Verse 19. So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but now you are, verse 15, one new man.

Verse 16, one body. Verse 19, one nation. Gentiles are now fellow citizens. And also, verse 19, one family.

Members of the household of God. Verse 20 to 22, one temple. What a tremendous purpose God has in Christ.

Unification. What he is doing in the church, he will do in the whole cosmos. He will unite all things, all things in heaven and all things in the earth in Christ Jesus.

Chapter 1, verse 10. And this unification happens as we are built on and built by the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which is their testimony of and about Christ Jesus, the words of the Bible, Christ Jesus who is the cornerstone.

[24 : 07] And as we continue to grow and mature in Christ, and we are joined together, we grow into a holy temple in the Lord. and we are also being built together into a dwelling place for God by his Spirit.

I don't know about you, but that makes me want to say, wow. Did you know that that's what is happening as we meet together and grow together Wednesday by Wednesday and Sunday by Sunday in your own fellowships?

Gives you a different view of church, doesn't it? that's why we all need to be in our churches Sunday by Sunday, being together under the word.

Being a Christian is a team game, is not an individual sport. We need to be under the teaching and preaching of God's word so that we will be shaped and molded and changed by it.

And as we are built and shaped and joined together to make this temple, to the world looking on, to this gathering, it would look very unimpressive.

[25 : 17] We look like a very unimpressive bunch, don't we? Especially the fellow up front. But we need to remember, don't we, God's tremendous purpose of unification.

Yes, we are a building site, a building site in great need of restoration work. work. But one day, friends, one day the scaffolding will be taken down.

It will be taken down and we will indeed be God's show home for all eternity. I know we don't feel like that sometimes.

I know it doesn't seem like that in these days where the church is oppressed and has been trying to be snuffed out. But that's why the Apostle Paul says in verse 11 and 12, you need to remember.

You need to remember what life was like, what happened, and what your life is like now, and what it's going to be for all eternity. So the Apostle Paul, friends, wants us to remember our terrible plight as Gentiles.

[26 : 23] We were alienated, alienated from God. But because of the gospel's transforming power, we have been reconciled to God and to each other.

And Paul wants us to remember also that we are part of God's tremendous purpose, unification for the whole cosmos and Christ.

But before we leave chapter 2 of Ephesians, just a word. Paul has outlined to us that God has made us alive in Christ, those who are dead in sin.

And he has made one in Christ, those who were divided. Outside of Christ, friends, there is nothing but death and division.

But in him and through him, we can know life. We can know peace with God. God, isn't it a wonderful thing to be a Christian?

[27 : 26] Isn't it a wonderful thing to be part of God's new humanity, the church? Let us pray together. Therefore, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh, called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Father, we thank you for your word to the Bible. We thank you for the truth these words speak. Truth that if we're honest, we don't often feel about ourselves.

And truth that the world outside tries to steal fears. So as we go out into the balance of this day and into this world, Lord, we do pray that you would help us to remember these things, to remember these things, the great tremendous purpose that you have in your people, of uniting all things in Christ, all things in heaven and on earth for all eternity.

[29 : 12] So gladden our hearts and cheer us and send us on our way rejoicing that we are part of this tremendous plan in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.