

RACIAL UNITY AND THE ONE NEW MAN

Ephesians 2:14-18

I began my first pastorate at the age of 17. I did not learn to drive until I was 19. For two years, I hitched rides from associated ministers and deacons. One of the church leaders apparently couldn't take it anymore. He showed up at my apartment one morning with a driving instructor, determined that I learn how to drive. After I completed the lessons, he took me to get my driver's license. I bought my first car the same day: Wednesday, April 29, 1992.

I had to teach a missionary society meeting at my church that evening and preach across town. As I took a break from my preparation to catch the news afternoon, I was saddened but not surprised to see a Simi Valley jury voted to acquit four LAPD officers of charges associated with the videotaped beating of RODNEY KING. Within hours, brewing racial tensions boiled over. I later watched with horror the live reports of four black youth that yanked white construction worker, REGINALD DENNY, from his truck and savagely beat him, on the corner of Florence and Normandie. I advised the members to go straight home. As I preached a revival service that night, a riot broke out in Los Angeles. When it was over, 53 people were dead, 2,383 people were injured, more than 7,000 fires were started, 3,100 businesses were looted, and nearly \$1 billion in damages were suffered. The riots ended when the military was called in. But an important turning point happened when RODNEY KING appeared on TV. He was obviously at a loss for words. In his stammering remarks, KING asked, "Can we all get along?" The question lives on. Personal problems, family issues, urban challenges, racial divisions, political infighting, terrorist threats, and international conflicts all beg the question:

- **Can we all just get along?**
- **Is true peace possible?**
- **What does it take for love to conquer hate, unity to replace division, and kindness to end hostilities?**

Ephesians 2:14-18 answers with God's plan for peace. The plan is a person: THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. **Jesus is the only one who can give you peace with God, self, and others.** **Ephesians 2:14-18** gives three reasons to look to Jesus alone for peace.

I. JESUS CHRIST IS OUR PEACE.

Ephesians 2 is about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Verses 1-10 describe salvation in personal terms. Verses 11-22 describe salvation in cultural terms. Verses 1-10 tell how the Lord makes Christians. Verses 11-22 tell how the Lord made the church. In verses 11-13, Paul addressed the Gentile members of the church at Ephesus: *"Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the 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. But*

now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." In verses 14-18, Paul explains how we got from where we were to where we are. True peace only comes through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

A. THERE IS PEACE IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

Micah 5:5 is a prophecy about the coming Messiah-King: *"And he shall be their peace."* This messianic prophecy is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. **Ephesians 2:14** declares: "For he himself is our peace." Jesus is the source and embodiment and personification of peace. Isaiah 9:6 calls him the *"Prince of Peace."* He himself is our peace. It is emphatic: "He and he alone is our peace." In **John 16:33**, Jesus said: *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."* One of the consequences of sin is a lack of peace. But **Psalms 34:11-14** says: *"Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."* **Do you want to live a good life?** Seek peace and pursue it. It should break your Christian heart that many black people in America feel their lives do not matter to those in authority. But the end does not justify the means. True peace is only found in Jesus Christ. Paul says: "For he himself is our peace." The only path to peace is to run to the cross, repent of your sins, and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. THERE IS PEACE IN THE WORK OF CHRIST.

Verse 14 says: *"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility."* Two aspects of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ prove he himself is our peace.

CHRIST HAS MADE US BOTH ONE. Verse 12 describes Gentiles as *"alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise."* These polarized groups have become one in Christ. He did not make the Gentiles a part of Israel. And he did not cause the two to coexist as separate but equal. R. KENT HUGHES comments: "Jesus didn't Christianize the Jews or Judaize the Gentiles. He didn't create a half-breed. He made an entirely new man." The two have become one. Galatians 3:27-28 says: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Ethnic, gender, or cultural distinctions do not define Christians. Blood is not thicker than water if that water is called baptism. In Christ, we are closer to one another than you would be to an identical twin that does not know Christ. We have become a whole new race in Christ. This new race is called the church.

CHRIST HAS BROKEN DOWN THE DIVIDING WALL. Verse 14 says: "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." There were various courts in the temple in Jerusalem. One was the Court of

the Gentiles – the only place in the temple the Gentiles were welcome. But Christ has broken down the dividing wall. The temple in Jerusalem continued to stand after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. It was still standing when Paul wrote this letter. So Paul is not talking about a physical structure. He is talking about a spiritual attitude. Hostility can build a wall without using bricks. Hostility between Jews and Gentiles was a separating wall. But Christ broke down the dividing wall of hostility. How did he do it? Verse 14 answers: “in his flesh.” This is a reference to the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus. The righteous life and atoning death of Christ reconciles sinners to God and to one another. Two years ago, our predominantly black congregation merged with a predominantly white congregation. When I am asked what I have learned from the experience, I state three primary lessons. (1) People are people. (2) We are all sinners in need of grace. (3) The more we focus on the gospel, the closer we get to one another.

II. JESUS CHRIST MADE PEACE FOR US.

Verse 14 says Christ is our peace. Verse 15 says Christ has made peace for us. In verses 15-16, we see three ways Christ has made peace for us.

A. CHRIST MADE PEACE THROUGH THE LAW.

*How did Christ make peace for us? Verse 15 says: “by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.” This is the only place the terms “law,” “commandments,” and “ordinances” are used in the same verse. It is an emphatic reminder that God has a righteous standard no one can reach. Romans 3:23 says: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We have broken God’s law. We have disobeyed God’s commands. We have violated God’s ordinances. But Jesus abolished the law of commandments expressed in ordinances. In **Matthew 5:17**, Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law of the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Jesus did not abolish the law by rendering it meaningless. He moved it out of the way by fulfilling the righteous standards of the law. **Romans 10:4** says: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”*

B. CHRIST MADE PEACE AT THE CROSS.

*Why did Christ make peace for us? Verses 15-16 says: “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 through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” Christ has made peace for us by reconciling us to God. **1 Timothy 2:5** says: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Christ reconciled us both to God in one body. Verse 16 tells us the means by which Christ did it: “through the cross.” **Colossians 2:14** says God made us alive in Christ “by canceling the record of debt*

that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” We broke God’s law. God had our rap sheet. God nailed it to the cross. The blood of Jesus covers our sins to reconcile us to God in one body. The unifying power of the gospel overcomes all racial barriers. WILLIAM McDONALD wrote: “The cross is God’s answer to racial discrimination, segregation, anti-Semitism, bigotry, and every form of strife between men.”

C. CHRIST MADE PEACE IN THE CHURCH.

Verse 16 says the proof that Christ has made peace for us is that he has made us “one body.” **Ephesians 4:4-6** says: “*There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” We are one in Christ. The barrier to peace among people is sin. Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed. When they sinned, they tried to hide from God among the trees and hid from one another with fig leaves. Sin separates us from God and one another. But verse 16 says Christ killed the hostility. The cross binds us together. We must not build any dividing walls of hostility in the church or allow any to stand. Marriages end over so-called “irreconcilable differences.” There are no irreconcilable differences if Jesus has killed the hostility between us. So it is with the church! Shame on us for allowing secondary things like personal tastes, music styles, program preferences, non-essential traditions, selfish ambition, or interpersonal conflict divide us. For Christ’s sake, we must tear down any dividing walls of hostility among us. **Ephesians 4:32** says, “*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*”

III. JESUS CHRIST PROCLAIMS PEACE TO ALL.

There is peace in the person and work of Christ. But verses 17-18 tell us there is also peace in the message of Christ.

A. WE RECEIVE THE MESSAGE OF PEACE THROUGH CHRIST.

Verse 17 says: “*And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.*” *When did Christ preach peace?* The obvious answer is during his earthly ministry. But that does not seem to be what Paul is saying. Christ occasionally ministered to Gentiles. But his earthly ministry focused on the lost house of Israel. Furthermore, verses 14-16 are clear that Christ made peace by his death on the cross. Verse 17 most likely points beyond the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus to the ministry of the early church. In a real sense, this is an affirmation of THE GREAT COMMISSION. In **Matthew 28:19-20**, Jesus declares, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy*

Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

To whom did Christ preach peace? Verse 17 answers: *“And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”* The Gentiles were *far off*. Verse 13 says: *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”* The Gentiles were far off. The Jews were near. But Christ preached peace to both. This is the sovereign grace of God. **Romans 1:16** says: *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* Here Paul reverses the order and says Christ preached peace to those who were far off and those who were near.

Sin places us all on an equal level. It is like the days of Noah. Some people lived on high mountains, others in low valleys. But when the rains fell and the floods arose, everyone died in the floodwaters that did not have a ticket to ride with Noah on the good ship grace. So it is in Christ. It does not matter if you are near or far. If you are in Christ, you are saved, safe, and secure. In **Luke 15:11-32**, the Prodigal Son was lost in the far country. The Elder Brother was lost in the back yard. One was far and one was near. Yet both sons needed to be reconciled to the father. So it is in Christ. Some have wasted their lives in nightclubs. Others have wasted their lives on church pews. But far is not too far. And near is not close enough. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

B. WE ENJOY THE PRIVILEGE OF PEACE THROUGH CHRIST.

The Bible clearly teaches that God is one in essence, three in person – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The word “TRINITY” is not in the Bible. But the truth absolutely is. Verse 18 is clear evidence of the triunity of God: *“For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”* Through God the Son both Jews and Gentiles have access in God the Holy Spirit to God the Father. All three members of the Godhead were at work to make Jews and Gentiles a new race of people called the church. God the Father planned it. God the Son accomplished it. God the Holy Spirit sustains it. The key word of verse 18 is *“access.”* It means, *“to bring near.”* The Greek term was the title for the person who introduced visitors to a ruler in the ancient world. The focus here is on the result, not the process. The finished work of Christ is a gracious privilege for believers. Sinners have no access to God. Verse 12 says: *“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.”* But **Ephesians 3:12** says in Christ *“we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.”* Let work, worship, and witness to spread the good news of reconciliation to the divided world!

The last battle of the American Revolution was the Battle of Blue Licks. But it was a battle that should have never been fought, for it was fought after the war was over! News traveled slowly. There was no means of quick communication over the Appalachian Mountains to Blue

Licks, Kentucky. So the two sides went on fighting because no one knew the war was over. Lost people are at war against God and against one another, because they do not know that the battle is over because of the finished work of Christ. May the Lord use us to get the good news out that the Lord Jesus Christ is our peace!