

Ephesians 2:14-18

Introduction

In Ephesians 2:1-10 we saw that we who were dead in sins have been made alive in Christ Jesus. Then last week, in verses 11-13 we saw that we who once were far off (as Gentiles) have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

“**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 the Old Testament, it was only *through* the outward privileges associated with being a Jew (temple, law, covenants, etc.) that one could ever come to the inner, “heart” privilege of knowing God and His salvation. That’s why Paul can sum everything up by saying that the Gentiles were those who had no hope. “Their future held only ‘the wrath of God’ that ‘comes upon the sons of disobedience’” (Thielman). They had no hope because they were forsaken by God in the world. We were without even the foreshadowing of Christ, we stood outside of the chosen people of Israel, we were excluded from God’s covenants of promise, we had no hope, being rightly and justly God-forsaken in this world.

“We Gentiles were at one time abandoned by God to our own disobedience [cf. Rom. 11:32), **but now** we have received **mercy**” – **but now** we have been brought near by the blood of Christ. And now Paul just wants to camp out here for a while. He wants to explore, and to revel more thoroughly in this amazing transformation. How could we not want the same thing – we who *are* Gentiles? “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ...”

I. “For he himself is our peace, who has made both things one”

To say that Jesus has made *Jews* and *Gentiles* to be **one** is an amazing thing. If we’ve done our job of “remembering” how things used to be, then it’s way more than amazing. It must seem crazy, and preposterous, and even impossible. How could Jesus take these two very distinct and very separate things and make them into one? How could uncircumcised Gentiles be *one* with circumcised Jews?

The separation between these two groups was one of the most basic, most fundamental, most ingrained distinctions of all time (cf. Lincoln). It was so fundamental that in the Old Testament, the **only** way to picture a future time of blessing for the Gentiles was to show the Gentiles converting to Judaism and making pilgrimages to worship in Jerusalem.

- ✓ Isaiah 56:6–8 — “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD... everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant— these I will bring to

my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.”

- ✓ Isaiah 2:2–3 (Micah 4:1-4) — It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
- ✓ Zechariah 8:20–23 — Thus says the LORD of hosts... Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

Here is blessing for the Gentiles in massive numbers, but still this *future* day of blessing is pictured as coming only to those Gentiles who convert to Judaism and make regular pilgrimages to worship in Jerusalem (cf. Zech. 14:16-19). This is how basic and fundamental was the distinction and separation between Jews and Gentiles. You couldn’t picture any future apart from this distinction (for one possible exception see Isa. 19:23-25). Maybe 150 years before Christ, one Jewish teacher had this to say:

“Our lawgiver... fenced us about with impenetrable palisades and with walls of iron to the end that we should mingle in no way with any of the other nations, remaining pure in body and in spirit... So that we should be polluted by none nor be infected with perversions by associating with worthless persons, he has fenced us about on all sides with prescribed purifications in matters of food and drink and touch and hearing and sight” (quoted in Lincoln).

The Gentiles were “worthless persons” not because they were less than human. They were “worthless persons” morally because they were idol worshippers. They had exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). This is why David could say of Goliath:

- ✓ 1 Samuel 17:26 — Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

This is why Samson’s father and mother could say to him:

- ✓ Judges 14:3 — Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?”

God had abandoned the Gentiles to their disobedience. So when God gave His Law *to Israel*, that Law was intended as a fence and a barrier around Israel to keep them *apart* from the uncircumcised, idolatrous *Gentiles*. First of all, the Law was given to the Jews and *not* to the Gentiles. But then the law added to this separation by imposing a long list of outward

requirements “in matters of food and drink and touch and hearing and sight” (cleanness and uncleanness). That right there is enough to show us why the unbelieving Gentiles would very easily come to hate the Jews. On the other hand, even though this should never have been, the Jews came to despise the Gentiles and to feel a sense of superiority over them – as though they had *deserved* to be given God’s Law. You can see how over time the Jews and the Gentiles came to be literally worlds apart. The wall that God intended to fence in the Jews and keep them separate from the surrounding pagan Gentiles became also an excuse for hatred and hostility toward one another. You could say that God’s Law had been reinforced and strengthened with man’s hatred. Man had added his own impenetrable wall of hatred to the *already* impenetrable wall of God’s law that divided the circumcised Jews from the uncircumcised Gentiles.

If *ever* there was a “class conflict” or a “class warfare” that would have seemed impossible to resolve, this was it. So how in the world could Jesus take these two groups and make them into “one”? How could uncircumcised Gentiles be *one* with circumcised Jews? “For he himself is our peace, who has made both things one...”

II. “and has broken down the dividing wall of partition—the hostility—having abolished in His flesh the law of commandments [expressed] in decrees”

Christ has *broken down* the wall that fenced in the Jews. And in breaking down this wall, He’s also destroyed the hostility and animosity that once existed between us. But how? How did He do this? How could He possibly do this?

Christ abolished *in His flesh* (in other words, *by His death*; cf. Col. 1:22) ***the law of commandments expressed in decrees***. This might seem confusing at first. Jesus said:

- ✓ Matthew 5:17–18 — “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

And later on in Ephesians, Paul will actually quote one of the commandments from the Law:

- ✓ Ephesians 6:1–3 — Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Why is Paul still quoting from the Law as an *authority* if Christ has actually abolished the Law of commandments? Well, let’s look at it this way. On the one hand, because God never changes, *all* of the Law still stands as an *authoritative* revelation of the character and holiness of God. Since God has not changed, the Law is still valid as an *authoritative* revelation of who God is and what God is like. It is still God’s will that children should obey and honor their parents. What Christ has abolished, then, is not the Law as a revelation of God’s holy character, but rather the Law as a ***binding covenant (or agreement)*** made *with* the nation of Israel. It’s the Law as a covenant agreement between God and Israel that Jesus has now canceled, and nullified, and made of absolutely no effect by His death on the cross.

We know that this is good news beyond what any Gentile could have dared to hope. But how can this law covenant with Israel be cancelled out, just like that, by the death of Jesus?

“For he himself is our peace, who has made both things one, and has broken down the dividing wall of partition—the hostility—having abolished in His flesh the law of commandments [expressed] in decrees...”

III. “that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,”

It’s simple. Christ abolished the Old *by bringing in the* New. By His death and shed blood on the cross, Christ established a new Covenant made not *just* with circumcised Jews, ***but also with uncircumcised Gentiles***. In this New Covenant, all the righteous requirements of the Old Covenant are finally fulfilled.

- ✓ Romans 8:3–4 (cf. Heb. 8:8-12) — For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

And so the writer of Hebrews can point out that,

- ✓ Hebrews 8:13 — In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete.

We should never forget that the tearing down of that dividing wall of partition and hostility between Jews and Gentiles required nothing less than the death and shed blood of God’s only Son, Jesus Christ.

In order to truly tear the wall down, Christ had to work the miracle of making both groups *one*. He created in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace. In verse ten Paul said that we are God’s “workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus.” As individuals who have been brought from spiritual death to spiritual life, we are God’s “new creation” in Christ Jesus.

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 5:17 — Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

But now Paul again uses this same “creation” language when he says that Christ has created in Himself one new man in place of the two. In other words, by His death and shed blood on the cross, Jesus has taken circumcised Jews and uncircumcised Gentiles and melded them together as a brand new, never before seen “creation.” That’s why Paul can write in Galatians:

- ✓ Galatians 6:15 — For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

You could go so far as to call it a brand new kind of humanity. As the NIV puts it:

- ✓ Ephesians 2:15 (NIV) — His purpose was to create in himself one new **humanity** out of the two, thus making peace.
- ✓ 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 (cf. Rom. 12:5) — For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.
- ✓ Colossians 3:10–11 — [We] have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

“For *He Himself* is our peace... [He has] create[d] *in himself* one new man in place of the two, so making peace.” It used to be that humanity was divided into two different groups – Jews and Gentiles. But now when Paul wants to sum up the whole human race, he lists not just two groups, but three:

- ✓ 1 Corinthians 10:32 — Give no offense to *Jews* or to *Greeks* or to the **church of God**.

And so the early Christians would even speak “of themselves as a ‘third race’ or [a] ‘new race,’ no longer Jewish, no longer Gentile” (Bruce). They were Christ’s new creation – a brand new kind of humanity. Can you imagine the miracle this was, and what it meant to the first generations of the Church? As one commentator puts it: “[The Jews and Gentiles] have not just been brought into a mutual relationship, but have been made *one* in a unity where both are no longer what they previously were.” (Lincoln) This new creation is what *we are* because of Christ’s shed blood and death on the cross. Here in this room is a brand new kind of humanity, uniquely created and brought into being only through Christ’s shed blood and death on the cross.

So far, Paul’s focus has been on the “horizontal” peace that Jesus has brought about between Jews and Gentiles. But when Christ abolished the Law of commandments as a binding covenant agreement, He also brought peace between God and man.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made both things one, and has broken down the dividing wall of partition—the hostility—having abolished in His flesh the law of commandments [expressed] in decrees, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace...”

IV. “and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”

As a binding covenant agreement between God and the nation of Israel, the Law of commandments expressed in decrees actually became an instrument of death. Now the fault was *not* with the Law, but rather the sinfulness of man. Paul writes:

- ✓ Romans 7:10–14 (cf. 3:20; Gal. 3:10; Heb. 8:8-12) — The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was

sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

The law was intended to drive people to see their need of a Savior and to trust in God for His free and gracious provision of forgiveness and salvation. But instead, there were many who insisted on looking to their own obedience to the Law as a way of meriting and deserving God's favor. Paul writes in another place:

- ✓ Romans 9:30–32; 10:3-4 — What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone... For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ***For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.***

Christ abolished the Law as a binding covenant agreement by accomplishing **two** miraculous things in His death on the cross. On the one hand:

- ✓ Galatians 3:13 — Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

On the other hand:

- ✓ Romans 8:3–4 (cf. 3:21-22; 7:4) — By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, [God] condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The terms of the Law as a binding covenant agreement have all been fulfilled. This was the ultimate hope of all the Old Testament saints. And so the Law as an instrument of death and hostility between God and man was **abolished** once and for all through Christ's death on the cross. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Paul continues:

V. "And [Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near."

Paul is thinking of two beautiful Old Testament passages.

- ✓ Isaiah 52:7 — How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who **publishes peace**, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."
- ✓ Isaiah 57:19 — "**Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,**" says the LORD.

"[Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near." In verse thirteen, it was the *Gentiles* who were "far off" from God *both* outwardly and inwardly *because* they were "far off" from Israel. But what about the Jews? Weren't they *already* near to

God? Yes, they were near in an outward, external way – because they had the temple, and the law, and the promises. But as we’ve already seen, being outwardly near to God didn’t always mean they were near to God in their hearts. There were many Jews who never responded to the privilege of knowing God’s salvation with a true saving faith. This explains why when Christ came and abolished the Law of commandments He preached peace not only to the Gentiles who were far off, but also peace to the Jews who were near. ***In preaching this peace, and reconciling them both in one body to God through the cross, thereby killing not only the hostility between Jew and Gentile, but also the hostility between Jews and Gentiles and God, Jesus has created an entirely new kind of humanity. Jesus has created a new kind of people, a brand new creation where not only are circumcised Jews and uncircumcised Gentiles ONE, but also where ALL without exception are the TRUE children of God by faith.**** And this is exactly what we are all a part of, and what we see right here in this room.

VI. “For through him we BOTH have access in ONE Spirit to the Father.”

Through Christ we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access in one Spirit to the Father. No longer do the Gentiles have to be brought near to the Jews in order to be near to God. The Jews themselves no longer draw near to God by the old ways.

The Old Testament pictured a future day of blessing for the Gentiles by showing the Gentiles converting to Judaism and making regular pilgrimages to worship in Jerusalem. This is how basic and fundamental was the separation between Jews and Gentiles before Christ. It was impossible to conceive of any kind of a future apart from this distinction.

But now, in Christ Jesus, the dividing wall of partition has been broken down. Now, in Christ Jesus, there is a brand new creation – a brand new humanity where there is no longer Jew or Gentile, but where all together have access in one Spirit to the Father. And so the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled today in the Church, even as Jesus said to the woman at the well:

- ✓ John 4:21–24 — The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”

Conclusion

The fact that we worship here and not in Jerusalem is a miracle of God’s power and grace. The fact that Jewish believers are now our brothers and sisters in Christ is a miracle of God’s power and grace. The fact that *together*, we all have access in one Spirit to the Father is a miracle of God’s power and grace. Christ has accomplished it all. He’s created a brand new kind of

* It’s only something this huge that can make sense of Paul when he says things like this:

1 Corinthians 15:22 (cf. 15:45) — For as in Adam all die [all of the old humanity], so also in Christ shall all be made alive [all of the new humanity].

Romans 5:18–19 — Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men [all of the old humanity], so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men [all of the new humanity]. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many [the old humanity] were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many [the new humanity] will be made righteous.

humanity in the Church. And if, in this new creation even Jews and Gentiles are now one, then there can be no other possible distinction remaining – there can be no other wall left standing.

- ✓ Galatians 3:27–28 (cf. 1 Cor. 1:13) — 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.

May we always display the miracle of this New Creation at Living Word Bible Church – always being eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of *peace* (Eph. 4:3).