

# God's Way of Reconciliation

*Ephesians*

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 2:16  
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Well, it's a glad pleasure, privilege of mine, to welcome you to our final service at the Creation Museum. We will be moving to our Ohio building effective next week, next Sunday morning, same time, 9 o'clock, and we are delighted to be able to do that. There is a little bit of nostalgia that comes with this and remembering what the Lord has done over the prior 3 years. I've thought often over the past few days on the first meeting in December of 2011 when Ken Ham graciously welcomed me and Paul Spires into the conference room here at the museum and offered his support as we started a new church and I am very grateful for those times. But more than anything, we're grateful for what the Lord does in our hearts as we open his word and that's our primary focus week by week and that's what we will continue to do as we move to Ohio, we will focus on the preaching and the exposition of God's word. Nothing will change about our philosophy of ministry simply because we will own our own building. We will do the same services in the same way, opening God's word, preaching it. We're not going to change what we do simply because we're changing location and so while there will be a little bit of physical relocation, there will be a spiritual continuity and we will trust the Lord to continue to bless what we have been doing and what we will do in the future. So we are very excited about what lies ahead and I'm confident in looking forward to seeing so many of you again next week in Ohio.

With that little bit of business, as it were, taken out of the way, turn in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians as we return to our verse by verse teaching through this wonderful letter of the Apostle Paul written to the church at Ephesus among others. We're coming to the verse now found in Ephesians 2:16 this morning. It kind of picks it up halfway through a sentence. I'll read verse 16 now and then we'll pick up the context in just a moment. Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ in verse 16 it says that he came and he made peace so that he,

16 might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

That's our verse for this morning and what we see in this verse is a summary statement of God's way of reconciliation. There is a major problem with the human race and that is that it is not the human conflict that we see played out in front of us or poverty or

anything like that, the main problem with the human race collectively and individually is that it is separated from God. This verse presupposes that everyone who is not a true Christian is separated from God, indeed, everyone is born into this world in a state of alienation from God. David said in Psalm 51, "In sin my mother conceived me." We are born into alienation from God and you can see this in Ephesians 2:3 in the context of this verse that we're going to look at. We've studied these verses so much in days gone by but in Ephesians 2:3, just to set the context, the Apostle Paul says, after having said there is this evil spirit working in the sons of disobedience at the end of verse 2, he says in verse 3, "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh." That little statement by itself is enough to humble every human being who ever lived and who now lives and who is breathing and is a sentient being; here you have a statement of the universal lostness of the human condition. It reminds us of the passage in Romans that says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Here in Ephesians 2:3, Paul states a similar truth in a slightly different way, saying that "we all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." All men, all women, all boys, all girls are found in this alienated state away from God, separated from God by the sin that is within them. Not just the wrong deeds that they have done, but by very nature being children of wrath. By very nature being those who are opposed to the reign of a righteous God.

This is a very profoundly serious condition that humanity finds itself in and in this verse in verse 3, we see that our sinful soul, our sinful state, manifests itself in many ways. Men are slaves to their lusts and to their habits and not only the habits of their body but the habits of their mind, their condemned sinful way of thinking, their godless way of thinking. Going through life without even giving a thought to the priority and preeminence of this God whom we have been praising here this morning. They do not want God to reign over them. It's not that they are merely misguided or uninformed, they are openly hostile to the living God. Romans 1 says that men actively suppress the truth that is within them. They take an attitude of hostility toward the truth of God. As he testifies of his reality in the creation around them and in the conscience within them and in the Canon of Scripture, men reject it and oppose it unceasingly. They close their eyes. They put their fingers in their ears and say, "We will not hear. We will not listen. We will not bend the knee." There is open hostility. Their sin sets them in opposition to God who by virtue of his very holy character requires from men a life of inner and external righteousness in harmony within his own holiness.

This is profoundly serious and we say this is what men are like toward God. What we sometimes forget is that the hostility is mutual. God will judge unrepentant sinners. God is holy. God is righteous. God, the Psalms say in Psalm 7:11, is a God who has indignation every day. He is not a kindly, benign grandfather who accepts everyone no matter what they do. He's not someone who casually dismisses this hostility against his holy, pristine, gracious character. He is a holy God who will vindicate his justice, who will vindicate his law, who will vindicate his righteousness. He is a holy God who must be feared. So on the one hand, to speak generally about humanity, on the one hand you have humanity opposing God and on the other hand, you have God in his holiness and righteousness opposing those men who are in rebellion against him. There is a conflict

going on. There is a rebellion of a cosmic sort that is in place during this time waiting the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, if there's going to be harmony with God, if you and I are going to have peace with God, if there is any hope for any man, woman or child to escape their sinful condition, escape this hostile condition, the guilt of sin must be resolved. The nature which opposes God must somehow be changed before there can be harmony with God, before there can be reconciliation with God, before this conflict can turn to peace. We must recognize the conflict before we can get to the solution. Having recognized and identified that conflict, our text today shows us how God brings about reconciliation and while the truths may be familiar, the fact that they are familiar to us in this church does not mean that they are any less profound.

First of all, let's see the need for reconciliation which we have talked about briefly. The need for reconciliation as we look at 3 aspects of God's way of reconciliation toward men and with men in this text that is before us today. The need for reconciliation. In this context of verse 16 of Ephesians 2:16, Paul is talking about the harmony that has been brought between Jews and Gentiles in the church. Look at verse 14 with me. We covered this a few weeks ago, Paul said, speaking of Christ Jesus, he said, "He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." What groups is he talking about? What 2 groups? Well, in verse 11, he's talking about "the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'Uncircumcision' by the so-called 'Circumcision.'" Jews and Gentiles are the 2 groups that he's looking at here and discussing now. He says in verse 13, "Now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups," Jews and Gentiles who formerly were in conflict with one another, he "broke down the barrier of the dividing wall," verse 15, "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." That's a mouthful for those of you that haven't been with us. Basically, just in way of summary, what Paul is saying here is that Christ Jesus, through his work of salvation to believing Jews and believing Gentiles, has brought together 2 groups of people who formerly were in conflict horizontally with one another, Jews despising Gentiles and Gentiles despising Jews. When Jews and Gentiles alike believe in Christ, they are brought into harmony in the place of the church. They set aside their former differences because the purposes of the law have been fulfilled in Christ in a common salvation, a common faith and a common Lord. Jews and Gentiles alike having been reconciled to God, find themselves in harmony with one another. This is what he's saying and by way of summary.

Well, Romans 3:9 says that both Jews and Greeks were all under sin. They were alienated from God and therefore they were at hostility with one another. What this passage is saying is that Jews needed salvation and Gentiles needed salvation. They both needed salvation quite apart from the hostility that marked their relationships with one another. Vertically, they were separated from God and here is the key principle for us today: this explains so much about the world in which we live still today. The vertical conflict that Jews had with God, that Gentiles had with God, that vertical conflict was the source of

their horizontal conflict and their lack of relational harmony. It's because they were at war with God individually that they were at war with each other.

Now, when we look at our world today and see the unrest and the jealousy and the envy that marks human relationships in any episode of the news that you look at today, it is still the same thing being manifested. You cannot educate people out of conflict. You cannot give people economic prosperity out of conflict because that just deals with it on a horizontal realm. There is no peace, no genuine, lasting peace between men until there is peace between men and God and that's the point of our text here today. Human conflict, whether it be in the home or whether it be between nations, human conflict is simply manifesting a prior and a more fundamental lack of harmony with God. Because men are at war with God in their hearts, they carry more over into their interpersonal relationships. If you think about it, if you want an illustration of this, just think back to the third chapter of Genesis. Adam did not point his accusing finger at Eve until after he had fallen into sin. Adam and Eve were in harmony with each other while they were in harmony with God. When sin entered into the picture, the finger-pointing began and it didn't take very long until Genesis 4, their sons, one of their sons was killing the other, Cain killed Abel. So the conflict and Genesis teaches this, the conflict between men is rooted in that original sin before God and nothing has changed in the intervening several thousand years. So, the conflict that we see around us is testimony of the unseen conflict between men and God.

Now, the question is and this is what the Jews and Gentiles were experiencing 2,000 years ago when Christ came, experiencing with each other and yet Paul says there at the end of verse 15, look at it with me again, at the end of verse 15, he says, that he made the 2 into one new man and thus established peace. How on earth did Christ establish peace between these warring parties? Well, he didn't sit down and have a big conference with them. There weren't papers that were written or mutual exchange of ideas. No, what we see in verse 16 is how it is that Christ came to accomplish that peace. Look at it with me here in verse 16 as we see the need for reconciliation. What had to be addressed before those 2 warring groups could be at peace with one another? Verse 16, Paul says that Christ in his flesh did something so that they might be reconciled "both in one body," here it is, "to God." They had to be reconciled to God individually as Jews reconciled to God, as Gentiles reconciled to God, before they could be reconciled to one another. When that spiritual, vertical reconciliation takes place, then the human reconciliation takes place as a necessary and logical result. Christ in his death reconciled these believing Jews and Gentiles individually to God and the reality of that vertical harmony produced horizontal harmony in the church.

The point for us to see here as we consider this need for reconciliation is that the human strife came from human sin and so whenever we are trying to think about how can we resolve problems between people, resolve problems between nations, resolve problems within relationships and within families, we have to start with the vertical reconciliation to God first. Anything else is just papering over a mold-infested wall. The mold is going to come out even if you paper over it and make it look fine for a time. You've got to get to the source and the source is this vertical rebellion against God that manifests itself in

part through human conflict. We have to understand the world around us and Scripture alone can help us to do that, whether it's warring nations or warring families. Men must come to Christ before they can find lasting peace with each other. Everything else is just temporary. When you've live just as long as I have, you can see the conflicts in different regions of the world that seem to be resolved percolating back up and that's just in a very short span of time, I might add. And history repeats itself because the root problem is never corrected.

So this is the need for reconciliation: Jews and Gentiles needed to be reconciled to God before they could be reconciled to each other. Now, secondly, where do you find this kind of peace manifested? Where do you find manifested? Where on earth can you go to find the manifestation of this kind of vertical peace with God and this horizontal peace with others? Well, you could go to the United Nations building in New York but you wouldn't find it there. You could go to a stadium at an athletic event but you wouldn't find it there. You could go to schools where they are educating people. You could go to the soup lines but you won't find it manifested there, not really. Not in the midst of reality. Not when the camera lights go off and people are walking back to their cars and the same old conflicts come back out again and again. You won't find this kind of reconciliation. You won't find this kind of harmony, this real, deep rooted, spiritual harmony in any kind of human institution whatsoever.

You will find this kind of harmony manifested in one place, this brings us to our second point this morning: the manifestation of reconciliation. The manifestation of reconciliation. Where is this made known? Where can you see this on display? Go back to verse 16 with me. You find the marks of God's way of reconciliation in the church, in the true church of Jesus Christ where truly regenerate, truly born-again believers are living life together. Look at verse 16, Paul says that Christ Jesus established peace so that he "might reconcile them both in one body to God," that he "might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross."

Now, when you see that phrase "in one body" you're probably thinking at first glance that that's referring to Christ's human body, that the reconciliation is found and manifested in Christ's body which he gave up on the cross to achieve reconciliation with God. That would be a reasonable thought at first glance but that's not what Paul is talking about right here. That's not what he's talking about at this particular point in time. You need to see this because this opens up vistas of understanding, vistas of responsibility as we think about our life in a local body called the church. The word "body" is consistently used in the book of Ephesians as a metaphor to refer to the church, to refer to those believers who have been called out and who gather together and who worship Christ together as a living spiritual body. You see this over and over again in Ephesians and because it's important, I want us to take a moment to just look at some of the passages here. What we are looking at is to see that the body is a reference to the church rather than referring to Christ's physical body at this point in the book of Ephesians.

Turn to Ephesians 1:22. Paul states this plainly and we need to understand the words that he uses by how he uses them elsewhere in the same letter. That's a basic point of biblical

interpretation. In Ephesians 1:22, it says, that God "put all things in subjection under His feet," under the feet of Christ, "and gave Him," that is, he gave Christ "as head over all things to the church," watch the clarifying language that comes, "which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." So Christ is given as head over the church, the church being his body, the body being composed of the individual members who have believed in Christ for salvation. Christ is head over the church, Paul says as plainly as he could, "which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." He makes a direct equivalence between the church and the body of Christ.

Look at Ephesians 3:6 where you can see, Paul says that, "the Gentiles," Ephesians 3:6, "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body." The Gentiles of whom he is speaking here in Ephesians 2 have been reconciled to Jews who had been set apart as the people of God. Paul says, "They are now reconciled to the Jews. They are part of the body of Christ. They are fellow members of the body, fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel."

He's not done. Look at Ephesians 4:12, speaking of how Christ gave apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers, what's the purpose of them? Ephesians 4:12, it's "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service." Then he makes a parallel statement, he says, "to the building up of the body of Christ." He's not talking about the Lord physically exercising so that he's more fit, he's talking about the spiritual maturation, the spiritual maturing of believers inside the church, the body of Christ.

Look at verse 15, "speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." We, who are growing up, "from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." The body of believers, not the physical arms and legs of Christ. It's obvious that that's what he's talking about.

One more, although I'm not giving you all of them here. One more in Ephesians 5:23. There is a big point to be made here. We just need to be clear and understand why we're understanding Ephesians 2:16 in the way that we are. Ephesians 5:23, "The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body." The body is parallel to the church. Christ is not the Savior of his own body, of his own sinless, physical body, he's the Savior of the body of believers who have come to him for salvation.

So the body is a reference to the church. Now, that's really important as you turn back to Ephesians 2:16. Let's look at it again, Ephesians 2:16, Paul says that Christ "might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross." He's making a very profound statement about one of the testifying realities of the true church that in the true church you find people who used to war against each other now living in harmony under the banner of the cross. Those who have been born again to faith in Christ now live together in peace whereas before they were mortal enemies. The church then is a place where peace vertically is proclaimed and where peace horizontally is lived out in relationships.

Beloved, beloved, this is why we place such an emphasis on the harmony of the body of Christ here at Truth Community Church. It's not simply so that we don't have the headaches of living in conflict with one another. It's not so someone can get their own way no matter what. That's not the point at all. The reason that peace is so important in the life of a church is because that peace between relationships among men, some of whom had nothing otherwise in common with each other as Jews had nothing in common with Gentiles, when people like that come together and live with a common purpose and a common peace proclaiming a common message, what's happening is that there is a corporate testimony to the reconciling purposes of God that goes on. So we have, individually and collectively, a responsibility to pursue harmony in our homes and harmony within our relationships in the church because that is in part how the church proclaims the truth of its message.

So, when conflict comes up, we deal with it and we resolve it and we move on. The church is not a place where settled bitterness and hostility toward one another can continue to exist because it's contrary to the very purpose of the atonement. It's contrary to the very purpose for which Christ came to die. He came so that he might purpose, so that he might reconcile Jews and Gentiles together in one place. What place? The body. What's the body? The church. So the church has, we as Christians have, especially gathered together in a common commitment to one local body, we have a commitment to peace that we must uphold and we subordinate some of our preferences and some of our conflicts to that greater overarching principle of peace.

I remember in the early days of our church, wanting to make this point with someone who had a disagreement with us and I said, "Friend, before we get to your agreement," and it was evident that he was settled in his opposition to the teaching, I said, "Before we get to the issue that you want to discuss, I want you to commit to the fact that peace is more important than the minor doctrinal point that you're trying to argue about here." He refused to do that and the resulting departure from the church was not because we wouldn't entertain differences of opinion, it's because he made it clear that his minor doctrinal point was more important to him than the peace of the body. That can't be. The only way that you can resolve issues is when there is a common prior commitment to peace that says, "Yes, we must resolve this in harmony." When someone says, "I'll split this place over my preference," you never get to the preference discussion because that embedded sense of hostility cannot be allowed to take root in the body of Christ. Why? Not because my opinion is so important but because the principle of peace in the church is one of the preeminent purposes in the work of Christ. It's one of the preeminent ways that the harmony of God and the reconciling message of the Gospel is manifested to the world. A divided body cannot testify to a harmonious relationship with God and that's why peace is so important. It's because it's central to the reason that Christ came and as those of us who live in subjection to Christ who want to see the honor of Christ upheld, who want to further his purposes, we further the purposes of peace for the sake of Christ, not for human motives.

Look at the text with me again. This is a core text in the book of Ephesians. He's our peace. He made both groups into one. He broke down the dividing wall. He abolished the enmity. He made the 2 into one new man. He established peace. Do you see it? Again and again and again, talking about the work of Christ: peace, harmony, 2 made into one, conflict resolved. That's why we zealously guard the peace within the body of our church, it's because we want to further the purposes of Christ with what we do. When men live together in peace in the church, they display the reconciling power of God. Charles Spurgeon said, "When we are reconciled to God, we are reconciled to men." This is part of the extension of the testimony of a church. Natural enemies join hands in the church when God saves them.

So, where the work of Christ, where the Spirit of Christ is at work, where the reconciling purposes of God are being furthered, you see that manifested in the church, in the local body, the unity that Christ established between men and God individually overflows into harmony between those who are in the church. I've said it many times, I don't mind saying it again: I thank God that in the body of Truth Community Church, there is a body where the spirit of peace predominates. Beloved, I know that you enjoy that too. I know that you cherish that and treasure that too. Well, there are 2 things that I want you to see as a result of that: 1. This doesn't just happen; this is a manifestation of the work of Christ in our midst that we have a body like that. This is a testimony, not only to the world but inwardly to us each individually, to us collectively, that there is a work of Christ going on because there is a body of scores and scores of people who live together and pursue the life of Christ together and we do it in harmony. That's awesome. It's a divine treasure that we enjoy the fruit of.

So we're grateful for that. We preach this because this is what's come up in the text, not because I'm choosing something to bang on to try to fix the problem. I don't have a problem here to fix. We are simply teaching the Scriptures. But what I want you to see and I'm going to park here in this side of the message here, what I want you to see is that it's something to cherish and it's something to preserve and to protect as well, not just because we like it this way but because we preserve and protect it in order to protect the honor of Christ who established it in the first place, to protect and to preserve and honor the reconciling purpose of Christ in coming to earth in the first place. That's why we do that. We cherish that and then we realize and what I want us to understand is that we have the privilege and we have the responsibility, we have a duty to do our part to preserve and protect that peace going forward ever and always. When we find ourselves starting to get engaged in a conflict, to step back and say, "What's involved here?" Before we receive gossip or pass it on, we say, "You know, this could be divisive, maybe it should just stop right here." Before we complain about this or that, we say, "Well, wait, wait, this is secondary. What about the principle of peace?" And we start to interpret our conversations and our relationships and our disagreements and our differences all through a prism that says that peace is preeminent here. You know what, maybe I could just put down as one of my friends says, maybe I could just put down the meat that would be the cause of conflict. Maybe I could just set it aside and not make an issue of it for the sake of harmony. Not because we are wishy-washy people, because we love peace because we love Christ and that's why Christ came was to make peace between sinners and a holy



God and to see that peace manifested in one body which is the church. We get a privilege. We have the opportunity to play this out, to live this out in our lives. And when we recognize the priority of peace, when we understand that this is part of the purpose of Christ in the church, then we can get on board with it and say, "Okay, let's go! Let's love one another. Let's minimize conflict, minimize things that would be irritating. Let's minimize all of that for the greater principle of this peace. I have a part to play," we say to ourselves as we look in the mirror. "I have a part to play in the outworking of the display of the peace of God in the local body." And it becomes a joyful way to live as we are beginning to experience more and more, month by month, year by year, as the ministry of Truth Community Church carries on.

Now, thirdly, we've seen the need for reconciliation, the manifestation of reconciliation that is seen and displayed in the church, thirdly, we see the source of reconciliation and this will make the Lord Jesus Christ very sweet and precious to us all over again today. What a privilege we have, beloved, not only to know Christ, not only to have our sins forgiven but for us to individually and collectively, corporately, to have the privilege of testifying about Christ, to describing him, to speaking about him, to declaring the glory and the worth of his holy name, the glory of the cross. What a privilege is ours to engage our mind and our tongues with such glorious themes. To transcend, as it were, the muck of the world, the mental realm of sin and superficiality and go to the realm of eternal glories that angels long to look into.

That's what we get to do here in the next few minutes as we look at the end of verse 16. The source of reconciliation. Look at the end of verse 16 with me again, that Christ "might reconcile them both," Jews and Gentiles, "in one body," that is, in the church, "to God," not first with each other but to God and then horizontal harmony results because vertical reconciliation has taken place. He "might reconcile them to God," how? Where did this come from? Where was this accomplished? "Through the cross." Paul said, "God forbid that I should boast in anything save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ," Galatians 6:14. Here we see him saying the same thing again.

Beloved, God's way of reconciliation is not found through protest marches. It's not found in politics. It's not found in peace treaties between nations. It's not found in cooperative statements between so-called Christians and Mormons and other opposing groups. All of that is a false view of reconciliation. All of it is fleshly, earthly means that cannot accomplish the real harmony that is missing in the first place. God, mark it, mark it, God makes peace at the cross of Christ. That is where sinners find their peace with God.

Turn over to Titus 3:5 for just a moment. I wanted to be sure to get this into the mix here. Titus 3:5, we looked at this passage a year or 2 ago. Titus 3:5, it is not through what we do that we find peace with God. Verse 4 of Titus 3, "When the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness." It is not the works of your hands. It is not your good religious works. It is not choosing a particular lifestyle or going through religious rituals that can reconcile you to God and make peace with him. He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness. We forfeit any claim to merit when we truly

come to Christ. We are saved by the work of someone else outside us. We are saved by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ who did that work 2,000 years before we were born, not on the basis of things that we have done. Salvation is not by works. God's way of reconciliation is found at the cross.

Go back to Ephesians 2:16, Paul says, he "might reconcile them both in one body to God." If you're not a Christian, it's like you're on a remote, isolated island and all of the benefits of civilization are across a sea that you cannot swim. There is no means to support yourself there. All that you can do is look forward to a certain death on that isolated island where you're all by yourself. You're separated. You're removed from the benefits of humanity on that isolated island. No place to go. No way to help yourself. That's a small picture of what it is to be a sinner before a holy God.

Well, what the glory of this passage is that Christ, our lovely Lord Jesus Christ, in complete self-denial, did something to make reconciliation a reality for his people. This word "reconciled" that's used here in verse 16 where it says he "might reconcile them both to God," it's a compound form, actually a double compound form in the original language. It has the idea that he might reconcile them completely, that there might be such a thorough going act of harmony, of reconciliation, of bringing sinners separated from God into his presence, reconciled and in harmony with him, so completely that there's nothing left to do. That's what Christ did on the cross. Christ did a perfect work on our behalf that resolved our conflict with God forever. You couldn't bridge the gap with your religious works. You couldn't cry tears of repentance that were deep enough to wash away your sin. You couldn't pray your way in. You couldn't work your way in. You were unable to save yourself. Our Lord Jesus Christ when he died on the cross, did what you could not do. He turned away the wrath of God against your sin by fulfilling the law's demand for justice against you. You had violated the law of God in thought, word and deed. You did not love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind. You did not love your neighbor as yourself.

The whole testimony of Scripture was against you. The full weight of the law condemned you. It said, "You shall not," and you said, "I will." It said, "You shall," you said, "I won't." And in the process of living that way, you incurred a great eternal judgment of guilt upon you that you could never satisfy. You had an infinite debt against an eternal God with no means of repayment and you were justly under the sentence of condemnation from the judgment throne of God. Out of harmony. In conflict. Separated. Scripture uses a number of different verbs to try to communicate the picture. Dead where God is alive. Guilty where God is holy. On and on we could go. With nothing to contribute and not even a desire to do so. That's how lost you were. Into that bleak picture of judgment, stepped the Lord Jesus Christ who took on flesh for the specific purpose of interposing his life blood to pay and ransom sinners from their eternal guilt against God. That's what Paul is saying when he said that he "might reconcile them completely through the cross." The cross perfectly satisfied the demands of divine justice.

Look over at Colossians 1 where we can let Scripture interpret Scripture for us on this. Separated, lost, desperate and dead and yet, beloved, here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when we

open the pages of Scripture, we see that a Warrior, a Champion, a Savior has gone before us and done what was necessary for reconciliation before we were ever born, before we could have ever asked. How great is Christ? How wonderful is he that he did this for us before we could even ask? He went to the cross on his own prompting, on his own initiative in fulfillment of the Father's good pleasure, Colossians 1:19, "It was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness," that is, all the fullness of deity, "to dwell in Christ, and through Christ to reconcile all things to Himself," there is that word for reconciliation, the English word reconciliation again. "All things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven." Verse 21, "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body," notice, he distinguishes between the church and his fleshly body. He uses the adjective to make it plain what he's talking about. "He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach."

What's the source of reconciliation? Go to the cross and find it. Go to Scripture and see it explained. It was there at the cross where Christ took on all of the evil of your soul onto himself so that God would punish him for your guilt, that justice would be satisfied because the law's penalty that was called for was paid and therefore the barrier that kept you from God has been eliminated so that you can now be reconciled to him through faith in Christ, trusting in that atoning work, in that atoning Savior, leaving behind your sin and guilt and leaving behind any claim of credit and going, as it were, to Christ, going to the cross and embracing that and finding in the cross your peace with God. That is where God makes peace. That is the source of reconciliation.

When a sinner puts his faith in Christ, God declares him righteous before his law. Not guilty of the sins that he has committed. The penalty was paid and placed on Christ and so not guilty. But more than just not guilty, more than just forgiven, God declares us righteous and places on our account the perfect righteousness of Christ and says, "I will deal with you as though you had lived the perfect life of my holy Son. There is no barrier between you and me now," God says to the Christian. You are reconciled to God through the cross. Righteous blood spilled on your account, washing away the sin and the full merit of Christ applied to your account. That's why Paul can say, "You are reconciled completely because it completely depends on Christ, not on you. It's through the cross."

And so, beloved, the implications of this for your conscience and for your peace of mind are just so immense. What this means is that God, if you are a Christian, God no longer holds your sins against you. Scripture says he removes them as far as east is from west. He buries them in the depths of the sea. So completely satisfied is the Father with the work of his Son, that those who believe in his Son no longer have God as their enemy, they have God as their friend. Jesus said, "I call you friends." You who once were an enemy now hold the title of being the friend of God because there is no lingering cause for hostility. Jesus paid it all. Everything that was necessary for your reconciliation, paid for in full at the cross. That's why Jesus said, "It is finished." That work of redemption was done and when you believe in Christ, all of the fullness of that is placed to your benefit and now no longer separated, Ephesians 3:12 says, we have bold and confident

access to the throne of God. That is how great the source of our reconciliation is. That is how great Christ is. That's how great his work on the cross is. It fully satisfied the demands of the law against your soul.

You know, there is a great irony at the cross. There is something counter-intuitive at the cross and Paul alludes to it. Go back to Ephesians 2. This is just marvelous. Through the cross, a shorthand reference to the death, the redemptive atoning death of Christ, I love this, he "might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it," speaking of Christ, "having put to death the enmity." Christ on the cross put to death the enmity, the enmity of the laws and the accusations and the guilt of the law that was against our soul and separated us from God, Christ has dealt with that and put it away. Do you know what Paul was saying here? When we talk about the cross, we are used to saying, and properly so, that Jesus died on the cross. You could say from a human perspective that the Roman soldiers killed Christ on the cross but do you know what? Christ himself was actively killing something as he died. Christ, in a sense, in a physical sense, was being killed but in the spiritual sense he was killing the spiritual division that separated us from God. All of that guilt which testified against us, all of the demands of the law, when Christ offered up his life on the cross, he was killing it, slaying it so that it would never bring accusation against his people again. So in his death, Christ killed. Killed our guilt. Slew it. Put it away forever. They could only put his body away for 3 days and then he came back up. When Christ kills something, it stays dead and what Christ did on our behalf was he killed that which divided us from God and now reconciled to God, there will be no resurrection of the accusations. They have been answered in full. The penalty has been paid.

Beloved, fellow brother and sister in Christ, you now go free and the law cannot call you back under its condemnation. Christ accomplished God's reconciling purpose in the full forever and we can rest in that. Hallelujah. S. Lewis Johnson said it this way and I quote, he said, "The Lord Jesus has taken upon himself the judgment that the broken law required. He has paid to the full for the people of God. That's why the people of God go free, their penalty has been paid. Heaven can exact no further penalty. Everything was procured for us by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ: forgiveness of sins, reconciliation to God, propitiation for sins, all secured by the cross."

Now, to bring this back full circle to what Paul is discussing here in Ephesians 2, men who share in that salvation vertically and have been reconciled to God and brought into harmony with God, by that powerful act of a great Savior, men who have been fully reconciled to God like that when they come together in the church, find that there is a natural harmony that they have with each other. That doesn't mean that Christians will never have disagreements or conflicts. Paul, soon enough in this letter, will exhort the Ephesians to live in unity. We understand that our practice falls somewhat short of our position but the true Christian who has received mercy from God has in his disposition a principle that is inclined to show like mercy to others and we teach to that, we call upon that aspect of our regenerate nature, we call upon that, we teach to that so that it would grow and flourish and start to manifest its prevailing power over the remaining conflict that might otherwise be found.

That makes for peace. When people who are truly born again and understand the reconciling purpose of Christ in his life, death and resurrection, now the recipients of a new nature that is like unto the nature of the one who saved us and brought together into a body of people who are just like that themselves: black or white, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, old or young. We don't need a bunch of different churches. We don't need a children's church and a teenage church and an adult church. We don't need contemporary and traditional services. All that junk does is perpetuate the sense of division. We don't need any of that. We come together as one and we worship as one and we manifest through that common worship the reconciling purposes of God. That makes for peace lived out visibly even in the way that worship services are conducted and that visible peace among men, testifies, manifests the unseen reality of sinners at peace with God, purchased at the lifeblood cost of a glorious Savior. At a glorious cost, at the cross of Christ, that peace found.

Let's bow together in prayer.

*Christian, take a moment to give thanks to God for the cross of Christ. Let the mercy which you have received incline you to make peace with those who may have offended you in whatever realm of life that might be. If you're not a Christian here today, recognize that the conflict that you have in your heart with God is not his fault. It's your own sin and God in his peace-making character invites you to come to Christ, to come to the cross in repentance and find your peace with God. God will make peace with you if you will simply come to Christ. Why would you turn away? Our Father, we thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ who is our peace. We thank you for the cross which is the source of our reconciliation with you. Help us ever to be at peace and to walk in peace. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

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