

# Breaking Down the Dividing Wall

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Ephesians 2. The apostle is coming from this glorious unspeakable outline, if you will, of sovereign grace, our wondrous salvation by grace through faith and all that God has done in that. Now he gets to, "Okay, what difference does that make? How does that make any difference in life?" And he's going to show it makes all the difference in the world. You know, we are not just theorists, we believe in experiential religion, that is, the doctrines we preach and teach are accompanied by a powerful Spirit that truly changes people's hearts, it makes them actually different and we, as a church family, are the illustration of that to the world. You see, it is true we must and ought to preach the Gospel and preach his word with spiritual power and passion and God uses that, but the Scriptures make it very clear that the reality of Gospel power in the local church relationships gives validity to the preached word. I've often said that the purity or the trueness of the church affects the power of the Gospel. There is really something to that.

So he's coming to, "Okay, what difference does all this make? How does this change people and how are you to be functioning?" Well, he gets right down to, if you will, brass tacks here toward the end of chapter 2. Look at Ephesians 2, beginning in verse 14. He says,

14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 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, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. 17 and He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Now, you and I live in a world that is at war. Our world is full of hatred and animosities and enmities and strife, terrorism, warrings, factions. And the liberal progressives of our day, I think that's a real ironic word to use for them, progressives. One of our businessmen had a young man come in the other day and he was talking about how he liked Florence, Alabama because there was sort of a new thinking, sort of a progressive thinking, and he was talking about sexual issues, if you will, or sexual orientations, to

which our church member said, "Well, we'll have to watch that for a while to see if it really is progressive, see where this ends up, see if it really progresses us to be a better society or not. The verdict is still out." Just trying to prick the guy to think a little bit to see where he would go with it.

Our day is one where the liberal progressives seem to be saying that we can have peace and unity if we just have this notion that every philosophy and every religious viewpoint are all equally valid, and the concept of freedom means everybody must be fully free to do and practice anything and everything they want, and then there is sort of a footnote to everything they believe and that is if you are of white, Western European, Christian descent, you're the problem. And if you're a white male of Western Christian descent, you're really the problem. So you find this schizophrenic and paradoxical embracing and celebrating almost of the religion of Islam; that we've got to have this marvelous openness and oneness to this religion because, after all, all religions are equal and everybody is to be treated equal. I challenge you historically to prove that America was founded on that. It's just not so. Our Constitution and our Democratic Republic was founded clearly on Judeo-Christian principles. While I think our founding fathers would have said, "Okay, you can practice your religion, but our Judeo-Christian establishment and beliefs are not going to be altered," as a matter of fact, there is more freedom for more people under Judeo-Christian ethic to run a country than there is any other philosophical approach. But this whole notion that we can just be open to everybody, it just doesn't work. I mean, pure researchers tell us that one third of all Muslims worldwide are either supportive of jihad or they are sympathetic to it. That's very serious and that's a problem. You can't have peace with people who are sympathetic to a religious doctrine that says convert to Islam or you die. How do you have peace with that? How do you embrace that? How do you welcome that? But there is this liberal, romantic, utopian view of peace that works good in the classroom and if you don't have a job and you can stay out all day and scream and march in the streets, that seems wonderful and fine but it doesn't work in reality.

It reminds me a little bit of Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of Great Britain when he met with Hitler before World War II, and Neville Chamberlain when he met with Hitler, was convinced that Hitler was a reasonable man and force would not be needed to stop him. He reasoned that Hitler just wanted to bring Germany out of the Great Depression. They had a severe depression after World War I and he just loved his country, but he wasn't a real threat to the rest of the world. Well, then Hitler began marching across Poland and here he comes toward Britain and they got rid of Neville Chamberlain and put Winston Churchill in and he did nothing less than pretty much help save the free world. Here's what we've got to realize: talking will not bring peace with evil men. You can't negotiate, you can't capitulate, you can't accommodate, you can't form a peace or union with evil men. Look, radicals like this whether it's Hitler or radical Islamic terrorism, whoever they are, they only understand one thing: greater force.

Now, I'm sorry but that's just the truth. I know you'd like for me to, I guess, get up here and say something different. Some of you might. That is the truth. We are, listen, we are in a fallen world and so peace is actually impossible. The only way to keep a semblance

of peace and decency and sanity in the world is for good countries to keep the evil at bay and that's what's been happening in Korea. We've had our armies in Korea for what, 50, 60 years now, to keep the evil at bay.

Now, fortunately that's not the case in the church. We have something radically new. In Christ Jesus, all the things that alienate, all the things that divide and all the things that would cause disunity are abolished. Now, let's look at those and I'll not be too long tonight. I. Notice he talks about how the Christ-centered life always brings peace among Christians, and the point being that if we are really walking with Christ, our church family will have disagreements, we may have some conflicts, but we get over them quickly. We humble ourselves and resolve them because we are all individually walking with Christ.

Look at verse 14 again, "For He Himself is our peace." Now, I just want to stop there for a moment. So as we live Christian lives, we are like Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Now, that premise has to be abiding in your heart and if that premise is abiding in your heart, you can always be at peace with other people who are walking in that same truth. Now think about it. "Well, I don't like this. Well, I prefer that. Well, why did y'all do that? Well, why didn't y'all remodel this part of the church before you remodeled that part of the church?" But then you think, "Well, who cares? I'm crucified with Christ." Amen?

I've probably had 8 or 10 people comment on some of the renovations we are doing and it has been really interesting because I thought, "That's exactly why you don't let a thousand people discuss what you're going to do when you renovate something," because you have a thousand different opinions and they all have some equal validity but you never get anything done if you did that. But the thing that I do greatly appreciate and, by the way, your opinion is always welcome, just like mine is. By the way, I'm not getting my way on some of this stuff. But it just doesn't matter to you because once you say it, you're sweet, you're kind in the way you say it, then you go on and say, "But that's not the big deal around Grace Life. Christ is the big deal and world missions is the big deal and the Gospel is the big deal. I would have preferred different stone but that's pretty good looking stone." I mean, I don't mean literally but, I mean, that's just an example of how we get over things when you are crucified with Christ. Do you get that?

Now look, that's got to be more than a motto. Listen to me, the Spirit of God must have wrought true regeneration of your spirit for you to be able to actually live that long term. Are you listening? Now, you can fake it in the flesh for a season but you can't maintain it long-term if the Spirit of God has not transformed your heart. Pretty soon you'll get on your little idol and you'll get your little feelings hurt, bless your hearts. You didn't get your way and so you get mad, you try to cause a division or you leave the church. If you get mad and leave the church over anything other than sound doctrine and the truth, you're in the flesh. You're not walking in Christ.

Christ is our peace. Isn't that good, folks? You see, we've got to model that to the world. I mean, in typical Baptist churches, mob rule is just the way they get things done. They get a mob fighting against this mob and typically, sometimes there is a group that is trying to stand on the truth fighting the group that's trying to lead the church into error. Now, that happens sometimes but most times it's one flesh group fighting another flesh group over something that doesn't really matter and our witness in the world is this: Christ's Gospel and Christ's Spirit has made no difference in us. We are just like the Rotarians when they meet or the Republican Party when they meet, fight and squabble. Or Democrats or whoever it is. No, we're different than that. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:31, "I die daily."

Now, there is a time when you get your feelings hurt, there is a time when you disagree, there is a time when you are a little ornery, but you get over it and say it doesn't matter. Scripture says we are to consider one another more important than ourselves. You can't do that if Christ hasn't changed your heart. You see, that's why he is our peace. James said in James 4:1, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" In other words, you're not crucified to yourself, you've become to make your thoughts, your desires, your idol instead of Jesus. So when you get upset over something, you get in a bad way with somebody and it's not over something that's essential as far as what the Scripture teaches is essential, then you are to humble yourself and repent and say it just doesn't matter.

Christ has given me the capacity to do that. I remember when one of our girls was really small and we were actually in a mall out of town, I forgot what had happened, and I talked about how you had to be vigilant. My wife said this morning it's to stay vigilant, I said, villagant. A villagant is a person who lives in a village. I just made that word up. You need one, you make one up. Vigilant. I said you've got to be disciplined and vigilant to walk in Christ but here's the thing, you can be because God's Spirit will help you to do it and enable you to do it. He does that and sometimes, that's why we have biblical conflict resolution at Grace Life Church is because if we get out of sorts with somebody, then if we can't get it fixed, we bring some other godly Christian in to sit down and rule over the situation and get it fixed. And even if you are 2% wrong and the other person is 98% wrong, if you're not willing to resolve it right, we're going to discipline you before the 98% wrong person because peace is foundational in God's church, not your way. And you can get over it because it doesn't matter.

Christ is our peace. He makes everything in us brand-new and a part of what's new is we have the capacity to die to our silly selves. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away, behold all things have become new." So all of our old prejudices begin to die. They don't die instantly but the seed, the germ to kill them is in there and it begins to kill it. The old resentments begin to die. The old grudges begin to die. The old enmities begin to die. The old strifes and divisions and the old fears begin to die. So we commit ourselves, as I said earlier, not to psychology which is hopeless and hollow, but to Christ in us. Look, we're not about behavior modification, where about spiritual transformation which does modify behavior. Did you hear me?

I had a class at the university and taught some or spoke rather on the change that Christ brings and the professor said, "Well, that's just behavior modification." I said, "No, it's not behavior modification, it's about Christ's power changing the heart." Here's the problem: the world doesn't understand that but if they see us with a capacity to have the kind of unity and peace that Grace Life has known for many years now, the world looks at that and says, "How can y'all do that?" Well, the point is we can't. He has changed us and therefore one of the byproducts and outworkings that prove he has is our capacity to have a union and a peace. Proverbs 10:2 says that hatred stirs up strife but love covers all transgressions. Proverbs 17:9 reminds us he who covers a transgression seeks love. And the point is when you walk in Christ – listen – you are ever aware of the great great debt you owe to Christ and to grace.

Let me give you a biblical example that I use quite often but it's such a powerful example. Onesimus is a runaway slave. Onesimus has left his master, Philemon, who is a believer, and while Onesimus is running away, he runs into the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul shares the Gospel with Onesimus. Onesimus is gloriously born-again and he is saved and he becomes a Christian. So Paul says to Onesimus, it doesn't say this in the Bible but we presume, "Hey, you've got to make this right. You actually legally belong to Philemon. You are to go back to him. Here, I'm going to send you a letter. You go back to Philemon, your master, and Onesimus, when you get back to him, you give him this letter and there should be union between y'all." So in the letter Onesimus takes back to his master and now brother in Christ, Philemon, Paul has some instructions in there. He says, "Philemon, this is, of course, Onesimus. He's come to me. He's run away from you. He probably owes you a lot of money. He has cost you money by betraying you but he's coming back to you. Now he's your brother. Receive him not just as a slave but now also as a brother, and if he owes you anything, Philemon," Paul said, "I'll pay for it." He says, "I'm signing it with my own hand." In that day when you put your signature, you were legally bound. He said, "I'm signing with my own hand. If he owes you anything, I'll pay for it," and then I love the Apostle Paul, he said, "Oh, but by the way, Philemon, you owe me your life." Why was that? Because Paul led Philemon to Christ. His point was, "Philemon, as a Christian, every single Christian, you are so radically, enormously in debt to God, to grace and even to the instrument God used to bring you the truth, how could you even think of holding a grudge against Onesimus?" Are you with me, church? You see, that's the difference Christ makes. That new love for what Christ has done for us just gets us over stuff.

Can I give you just a little sideline hint or clue that helps me? I wish I could tell you I'm 100% here. I hope I'm better than I used to be but when I have practiced this truth, it helps. When somebody does you wrong, when somebody has mistreated you, somebody has cheated you at work, young people, somebody is ugly to you at school, you've got to go to God with praise. You've got to go to God with praise and thanksgiving and say, "God, I'm not praising you or thanking you for whatever evil or wrong they are doing, but I am praising you and thanking you that you know what's going on here and you could have stopped it and you didn't, so you've got a purpose. So give me the grace to get through this and show love back while you're doing and performing what you're going to do." Joseph was abandoned by his brothers, sold into a caravan of gypsies but he ended

up in the dungeon again in Egypt and became Prime Minister of Egypt after he interpreted some things and look at the things God did through it. He comes and his brothers come to him during the famine and they look at Joseph, they're the ones who sold him into slavery, they are scared to death he's going to have them killed. He's the most powerful man in Egypt under Pharaoh and he said, "Fellows, you meant it for evil, God meant it for good." Only Christ gives us the capacity to hold onto that and to walk in that.

Now look at verse 14 again, "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one." Now of course, historically in this context, that's Jews and the non-Jews or the Gentiles. Now, you cannot even fathom how radical that statement was in this day. It was just off the pale radical to think that, "Jews and Gentiles are one?" Radical thinking from a traditional Jewish perspective. Jesus referred to the fact that Gentiles were equally his sheep when he said in John 10:16, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall be one flock with one shepherd." So Jesus is ministering primarily to the Jews and primarily the Jews are hearing him, not exclusively but primarily, and he says, "By the way," and this blew their minds, "I've got other sheep from other peoples and I'm going to call them too and you're all going to be one sheepfold with one shepherd." Radical. That means, look, for Jews and Gentiles to become one in anything took the radical transforming power of God. It takes the Gospel.

That's why he continues on in verse 14, the third part, "who made both groups into one," here it is, "and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." Broke down the barrier of the dividing wall. That pictures the deep division between Jew and Gentile, and this great division was vividly pictured in the way the temple was constructed. For example, the temple in the innermost court had the court of the priests and only male persons of the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, were allowed in the court of the priests. Then there was a divider there and outside of that was the court of Israel. Only male Jews could go into that court. Outside of that was the court of women and that's as far in as women could go toward, of course, the Holy of Holies where God would manifest his presence. Then outside of the court of the priests, the court of Israel, and the court of women, was the court of the Gentiles but it so thoroughly had a barrier keeping the Gentiles away from all the Jews. First you had to descend down five steps to a level area where there was erected a five foot stone barricade and it went around the temple enclosure. Then you went down 14 more steps down to that court of the Gentiles and the stones on the wall had inscriptions warning non-Jews to never go beyond that wall under penalty of death. As a matter of fact, one stone, it's in a museum in Istanbul today says, "No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and the embankment around the sanctuary and whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which will follow." So, I mean, it was just ingrained, ingrained in the marrow of the soul of the Jew and the Gentile, "We are radically separate people." Two very separate people. So there was a deep bitterness and a deep hostility between Jew and Gentile but what Paul is saying here, and that's why you have all these glorious truths of Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 2 about how sovereign grace, God's sovereign grace power apprehends and transforms people and makes them new and different because when Christ does that and he changes someone, even people as

naturally in enmity or divisive as Jew and Gentile come together as one. Radical statement.

Listen to this radical statement from Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female," all of these in traditional Jewish thinking and even in Gentile thinking were great barriers or divisions between groups. But, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." We might say in our day, "There is not black or white, there is not rich or poor, we are all one in Christ Jesus." I believe that today, for example, there has been a lot of discussion through the years of why aren't churches more segregated between the races. I don't have a real answer for that. I do think some of that is because far too many people treasure their culture over there Christ. "I fit that culture better," they would say. And I can understand that. That's not always wrong. I mean, you and I enjoy certain types of things with certain types of people. We kind of grew up that way. But sometimes if it begins to have sort of a taboo in the community, it's wrong. There is an idolatry of your past culture over your present Christ.

Well, II. he's going to talk about now how the elimination of law and ritual puts all people, all believers rather, on common ground. Look at it there in 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." So the Jews had all of these laws, these ceremonial laws that they alone had, the Gentiles did not have them so they were outside. So the Jews would have certain feast days, certain sacrifices they brought, certain offerings they brought, certain laws of cleansings and purifications, and they would look at these Gentile dogs and say, "They keep none of those feasts. They keep none of those sacrificial system. They do none of those cleansings so they are dirty and unclean and outside of God's family." In fact, the Jewish dietary laws alone made it practically impossible for a Jew to share a meal with anybody other than another Jew. Just the presence with somebody, the way they would eat, eating with them would defile them or they would say, "They are defiling us by the way they come in and want certain foods or eat their food in a certain way." You know, in Acts 10 we have the Apostle Peter who saw the vision coming down out of heaven and there was all of these animals on there that according to Jewish law the Jews couldn't eat and the Lord said, "Peter, kill and eat." He didn't quite know what that meant but then right when the vision disappeared, servants from a Gentile, Cornelius, were knocking on his door saying, "Come and tell us about this Christ," and Peter said, "Aha, I know what God is saying. They are no longer unclean like these animals on this vision were unclean. I can eat those animals." In other words, we can reach out to non-Jews. The barrier has been taken out of the way.

Now, an application for us and we talk a lot about this because we have to be vigilant and disciplined to continually guard against us – listen to me – us as modern Baptists or evangelicals forming our own little laws, our own little rituals, and we end up saying, "If you don't embrace our little laws and our little rituals that have a half a thimbleful of Bible backing them up, then you're out of our group." Do you know how many Baptists

there are? Why are there all these different Baptists? Most of it is based on stuff outside of main biblical doctrine.

Our flesh has a proneness to that and so we have to watch that, and how the enemy has reintroduced what you might call this sacramentalism, a sacrament, a certain practice, a certain ordinance, a certain ritual in church life that we hold to that the Scriptures do not really teach, at least not with any clarity or thoroughness, and we begin to raise those up and we begin to put our emphasis in those – listen – instead of in Christ. And then generation after generation after generation passes through our church and they all went through the motions, they all partook of the ritual, they all performed the sacrament but few of them know Christ. And it happens to the Episcopalians, it happens to the Catholics early on, it happens to everybody including Baptists and including evangelicals. And I think and I believe this with all of my heart: that's one of the reasons in God's sovereignty I was not converted until I was an adult and I was not raised in church because as much as anybody, I could be converted and come in and say, "Why are y'all doing that?" I just had the audacity to say, "Well, why do y'all do that?" I was a question asker, "Why do you do that? Is that scriptural?" And I had too much pride, too much zeal and too much arrogance at times, I confess that. I tried to be repentant about that, but those questions need to be asked.

What happens is in the first generation, they develop a pattern of doing something that's beyond what Scripture requires. The second generation takes that pattern and makes it a tradition. The third-generation takes the pattern that became a tradition and it becomes in effect a sacrament. This is what we are. All kinds of silly things. So we must have biblical discernment and biblical vigilance to not allow any evangelical or Baptist methods or traditions become patterns, traditions and then sacraments. We must continually for peace's sake, die to traditions, die to our pride, and die to our customs. As someone said, "Well, the Gospel is powerful but our methods are strong." No, the Gospel is powerful. Period.

You wouldn't believe how many people when I was a young pastor tried to help teach me how to give an invitation. Show me the chapter in the Bible where it teaches you how to give an invitation. Show me a verse in the Bible that tells a pastor how to give an invitation. Do you know what's in the Bible? Preach the Gospel. From the moment I began preaching the Gospel until the moment we sing the last song and go home, we are inviting people to Jesus the whole time. Why wait for two songs at the end of the service? Amen? Let's invite people to Jesus the whole time. Let's plead, let's urge, let's preach, let's announce, let's beg, let's entreat, let's exhort, let's command people to come to Jesus all the time. Why develop a pattern that becomes a tradition that becomes a sacrament that is really your idol and if you don't do it that way, well, you're no longer in?

The head of a theology department at a major graduate school discussed us in his class not too long ago. Did you know that? Do you know we're in a lot of books, did you know that? Most of them are good, by the way. And in their class, this is a doctoral thesis class, they said, "Well, Jeff Noblit doesn't give an invitation anymore." And I'm so glad another professor happened to be sitting in there who was a friend of mine and he stopped the



class and rebuked the professor and said, "Oh, yes he does, it's just not your little traditional pattern that the Bible doesn't speak about." He didn't say that but that's what he meant.

Now, the point being: what at the end of the day comes of that? That causes division, does it not? Look, I want us to gather because we've all been changed by the Gospel, not we've all embraced the same patterns and rituals. Are you with me, church? We all have the same love for Jesus. We all have the same love for sound doctrine. We all have the same treasuring of our God. We all have the same capacity to die to ourselves and get over ourselves and repent of having our own way. And what happens? Christ has changed us and that gives us peace and unity and when the world sees it, God gets the glory.

So you stop looking for those who agree with your methods and you start looking for those changed by the Gospel. Boy, we started doing that many many years ago and it has been such a sweet journey ever since. You just can't be a member here if you haven't been changed by the Gospel because that's God's way of building his church. That's not my rule, that's God's rule. You have to be changed by the Gospel. You say, "Pastor, what does that change look like?" A repentance of sin, a humility before God and a love for the Scriptures. A love for God, a love for the truth, a love for the word. And just a humble willingness to grow. You can make messes every day but if you're humble and repentant and want to keep growing, you are welcome. Amen? We like baby Christians. I used to be one.

Look at verse 15, "by abolishing in His flesh," that's in the flesh of Jesus, "the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances," here it is, "so that in Himself He might make the two," now to them that was Jew and Gentile but it could be any division, "make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace." So he makes even people as radically in the enmity toward each other as Jew and Gentile into one unified new man.

Now, that word "new man" literally means "fresh man." It's a fresh, brand new thing. It's not just a recently completed thing like I made a car or I built a house, but it means a totally different car or totally different house. You become a totally different kind of person. You're not just an improved Jew or an improved Gentile. No, you're so different now you're not even a Jew anymore or a Gentile, you're a Christian and you are made as one new man.

Remember in Galatians 2 where Paul gives the story of having to rebuke Peter? Do you remember that? That's pretty interesting, isn't it? The Catholic church says Peter is the first pope of the church and the founder of the church and the pope has to be infallible and we've got a biblical record where Paul had to rebuke Peter and call him to repentance. That's not a very infallible pope, is it? Peter had begun to segregate himself away from Jewish believers. Why did Peter do that? He just was caught off-guard. I think Peter loved God and was a man of God, but he was caught off-guard. Some high up muckety-mucks from Jerusalem came down and began to check out the work and they

were Judaizers. They were men who had mixed some of the old law with Jesus. Have you ever heard of that before? We can be more effective if we mix Jesus with whatever our culture presently is having fun with? Is that new to you? No, Alabama flesh people are not better than old Jewish flesh people. We all do that.

Anyway, these high muckety-mucks from Jerusalem came down to this Gentile church in Galatia and Peter felt pressured by them because they would tell you, "No, there is still a division. You know, a Gentile believer isn't quite what a Jewish believer is." Jewish believers are up here, Gentile believers are down there. So Peter under the pressure of those dignified, influential, Jewish Judaizers quit eating with Gentile believers thinking they were kind of unclean. Paul shows up and says, "I rebuked him to his face because he stood condemned." Now, here's mighty Apostle Peter and mighty Apostle Paul in a conflict but it wasn't really a conflict, it was Paul straightening Peter out. He said, "He stood condemned." Do you know why? Because Peter had previously hung out with Paul and Barnabus at Antioch, a church of predominantly Gentiles, and in that setting, in that context, Peter hung out with Gentiles, ate with Gentiles, fellowshiped and didn't have a problem. He gets down to Galatia and all of a sudden Peter under the pressure of the Judaizers who show up, begins to separate himself off. My point is: Peter quickly repented and got back in line and we all can do that. We all can get out of line but the Spirit of God enables us to get back in line.

Alright, III real quick: the cross brings peace with God and certainly peace with one another. He reiterates by saying in verse 16 through 18, beginning in verse 16, "and might reconcile them both in one body to God." You know, earlier we spoke of the Gentile court, the court of women, the court of Israel, the court of the priests, all these separations, but in the innermost part of the temple was what was called the Holy of Holies, and the Holy of Holies was that little room where the ark of the covenant was and the mercy seat was placed over that ark, and then the cherubim were over it, and that's where the high priest would come once a year and sprinkle the blood on the great day of atonement. And the Holy of Holies was separated from everything else by a six inch thick veil and nobody but the high priest could go in there once a year and tradition tells us he went in there with a rope around his waist lest in the presence of God he be killed and consumed and nobody else could go in there. They would drag him out with the rope. So it was a powerful picture that there was a barrier between God and men.

Now real quick, Matthew 27, starting in verse 45, "Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. But the rest of them said, 'Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him.' And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit." Verse 51, here it is, "And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split." The barrier removed. Jesus by his death has put to death the enmity. He's reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to himself through the cross and when a Jew or Gentile, a black or a

white, or whoever it may be, receives Christ as their Lord and Savior, they get back what Adam lost in the garden of Eden but much much more, because the Eden that the second Adam, Jesus, is making for us is far far better than what the first Adam had to start with. It's all changed.

Verse 17, "And He came and preached peace to those who were near," that's the Jews. They need peace with God even though they had the law and the covenant and the ceremonies and the temple and so many things, to bring them close to the things of God, nevertheless they were still far away because they didn't have Christ. "And to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near," verse 18, "for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father." Ephesians 6:15 calls the Gospel the Gospel of peace. Ephesians 2:1 and John 3:18 says we were at one time enemies with God but Romans 5:8 says, but God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:10, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." So he says not only has there been a great barrier removed between the greatest divisions culture could possibly experience, and in that day that was Jew and Gentile, he said the great barrier between God and man is also removed and that's how it's removed for people because it's removed between people and God.

You see, as Christians we're not interested in getting people to get along. Are you listening to me? We're not interested in people having peace, we're interested in people having peace with God and then they will have peace with each other. We're not about peace primarily, we're about peace with God and that always brings peace to the people.

Now, this Holy Spirit, verse 18, we all "have our access in one Spirit to the Father." The same Holy Spirit indwells all Jewish believers, all Gentile believers, all white believers, all yellow skinned believers, all red skinned believers, all black skinned believers. It doesn't matter who you are, we all have the same Holy Spirit. That same Holy Spirit drew us to Jesus Christ, John 6:44. That same Holy Spirit imparts new life to us, John 2:5, John 3. That same Holy Spirit reveals Christ to us, he bears witness of Christ as we hear the word preached, study the word of God, we begin to learn of, know, love, joy in Jesus better. That same Holy Spirit intercedes for us, the Bible says, Romans 8:26-27. And that same Holy Spirit has sealed us in God, securing and preserving our eternal salvation.

So here's the point: what we have through the cross and the work of the Spirit in common radically exceeds whatever it was culturally that separated us. Peace.

One last point. He says we have, in verse 18, "our access in one Spirit to the Father." The word "access" is a term used of an official who introduced persons to the king. The Spirit of God brings us to the King. He makes us one with the King. So we all became one as we all are brought by the same Spirit to the same Father. We come not in fear and dread but we come to the Father because of the cross, knowing he has forgiven us and knowing he desires to bless us. I hope this is not in any way derogatory toward our Christ but Christ is like the funnel and all these people from all different places are coming to God

through the funnel and we all become one as we come to God and that's the peace that we have.

Now, let's as Grace Life Church of the Shoals live out that peace. Now, as far as I know there are no divisions, parties, strifes, problems between people in the church, but let's don't let there be either because he is our peace.