

Christ Our Peace

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[0 : 00] In Scotland, we have a saying. If you're not native to Scotland, you'll know this is true.

If it isn't already raining, it's going to rain. If it isn't already raining, it's going to rain. We know that's true, don't we?

It's going to rain. As human beings, we can also say, if we aren't already at war, we're going to be. If we aren't already at war, we're going to be.

Never mind wars between nations, we're talking about wars between people and within people. We might dare to call them sociology and psychology wars.

As a species, we're called Homo sapien, the knowing man. But history proves that we should be called Homo pugnatus, the fighting man.

[1 : 09] Read the newspaper. Watch the news. Troll social media if you want more proof. We're a people who are at war with ourselves and with everybody else.

By contrast, the gospel of Jesus Christ offers peace to all who believe in him as Savior and Lord.

The gospel offers peace with God, with each other, and peace within. And all because Jesus died on the cross at the hands of Homo pugnatus, the fighting man.

And he died on the cross for Homo pugnatus, the fighting man. The new society which God created through the death of his son, Jesus Christ, he calls the church.

If there's one place in the whole world designed to be at peace, it's the church. Now, of course, it didn't all was that way. Because even though Christ has made complete peace for us, our faith in him isn't complete.

[2 : 20] And therefore, too much of the fighting man still remains within us. But God's new society, God's church, it ain't about hatred and war, but about peace.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Ephesians 2, verses 11 through 22, detail for us the world-changing impact of the death of Jesus.

Of how through him peace is made and a new society is born. This passage is packed with dense teaching, each element of which, studied deeply by ourselves in our own time, will warm our hearts and will fill them with joy and with assurance.

But this morning, let's consider three things together. First, from verse 11 through 13, who we were by nature. Who we were by nature. Second, what we are by grace.

[3 : 46] And thirdly, how we got there, from verse 14 to 18. The aim is peace. Peace within.

Peace with each other. And most importantly, as we'll see, peace with God. And as we'll see, it is all through and only through faith in Jesus Christ.

First of all then, from verse 11 through 13. What we were by nature. Therefore, remember that at one time. And so on. Just as Ephesians 2, verse 1 through 3.

Picture life without God. So Ephesians 2, 11 through 13. Paints a picture of alienation. Separation. Hopelessness. Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus.

A church which is made up of both Jewish and Gentile background Christians. Some were ethnic Jews and had become Christians. But others were Greeks.

[4 : 49] And others Romans. And still others, different nationalities. They too had become Christians. But traditionally, Jews and Gentiles hated each other. Jews called the Gentiles dogs.

Greeks because they thought of them as unclean and uncivilized. Gentiles called the Jews the circumcision. Because of the surgical procedure which every Jewish male went through as a baby. Everyone hated the Jews. As many still do today. Last week, we were in London visiting my brother. And the week before that, a Jewish graveyard in East London was desecrated.

With swastikas spray painted on top of toppled Jewish tombstones. The Jews are still a hated people.

There's always been hatred between the Jew and the non-Jew. There is now, as there was in Paul's day. Which makes their coexistence and equality in the church in Ephesus all the more remarkable.

[6 : 04] Because whereas once there was only hatred between them. Now, through Jesus Christ, there is peace, love, and fellowship. Now, in these verses, verses 11 through 13, Paul is addressing Gentile Christians and reminding them that before they came to know Jesus as Savior and Lord, they were separated from all the promises of God.

They knew nothing about God's good purposes for humanity. Nothing about salvation. Nothing about God's promise of a Messiah through whom all the nations would be blessed.

Estranged, separated, alienated. That's how the apostle describes our situation as non-Jews, as Gentiles.

My prehistoric ancestors. The Picts. They worshipped the sun and the stars.

They bowed down to statues made of wood and stone. They sacrificed each other in the hope of a good harvest. Despite all their fanciful reconstructions, despite all fanciful modern-day reconstructions of pagan religion, my ancestors lived a brutal life.

[7 : 29] Short, painful, confused, meaningless, ignorant, and altogether without hope. My ancestors, and many of yours also, were, as Paul says in verse 13, far off.

And as he hauntingly remarks in verse 12, having no hope and without God in the world. Having no hope and without God in the world.

In Paul's day, the Jews did everything they could to reinforce how lost and hopeless the Gentiles really were. They designed a temple in Jerusalem to keep Gentiles out.

They erected a temple around the inner courts to keep non-Jews away from the earthly presence of God. You don't belong here. Alienation.

Separation. Hopelessness. It's a picture of the entire non-Jewish world before Jesus came. Its religion was focused on nature worship.

[8 : 39] It offered no real knowledge of God. It gave no hope. But Paul's not just reflecting on a Gentile world lost without Christ. He's talking about every single human being, Jew or Gentile.

Without Christ, there is no hope in the world. Without Christ, every human being is a stranger to God. In verse 1, Paul describes us as dead in our trespasses and sins.

In verse 12, having no hope and without God in the world. Outside of Christ, we are separated from God. And therefore separated from each other.

And separated from who we really are on the inside. Because if our vertical relationship with God is not right. Our horizontal relationships with each other cannot be right.

And if we're not right on the outside with others. We cannot be right on the inside with ourselves. But most serious of all.

[9 : 53] Is not so much that we are not right with God. But because of our sin. He is not right with us. But because of all the wrong things we do.

And the sinful natures we inherited. We are by nature. As Paul tells us in verse 3. Children of wrath. And by inference in verse 16.

We are unreconciled to God. Our biggest problem as human beings. Is that because of who we are. By virtue of our sinful natures.

God. A holy God. Is not right with a sinful us. We are without him. And therefore we are without hope in the world.

Think of these words. Having. No. Hope. Having. No. Hope.

[10 : 57] Isn't hope more essential for us. Than the air we breathe. Imagine a world. With no hope.

Of love. With no hope of friendship. With no hope. Of sympathy. With no hope of meaning. With no hope of joy.

With no hope of hope. It is darkness. It is the blackest darkness. Of all darkness. It is a life.

Not worth living. Where death. Itself is no friend. Because. Beyond death. Lies only the judgment.

Of a holy God.

And eternal misery. The sad thing is that. In our society. People think they can have hope. But they can find it. Without God.

[11:58] Notice how. Please look with me. At verse 12. Very important. Notice how the apostle. Links hope. And God. In verse 12. Having no hope.

And without God. In the world. It is almost like he says. There is no possibility. Of hope. In this world. Without God. Remember.

John Lennon. Imagine. Imagine. No God. A true brotherhood of man. He said. There can be. No hope.

In this world. Without God. I want to ask the atheist. What is your hope. For your children. For your grandchildren. Later on. Why don't you read the book of Ecclesiastes. With its vision of a hopeless. Meaningless.

[12:57] Life. Without God. This is who we were. Before we came to know Christ. As Savior and Lord. We were separated.

We were hopeless. Surely. Surely. The pathetic state. Of a hopeless humanity. Without God. Should stir us up.

As a church. To mission. And evangelism. For without. God. For all its education. For all its civilization.

For all its wealth. For all its BMWs. Audis. And Mercedes. Parked outside the high school. This morning. While the kids played hockey. Our friends.

Our families. Our neighbors. Are lost. In the darkness. Without Jesus. Lost. Without the gospel.

[13:56] We profess to believe. We have the light. Of Christ. And of hope. In our hands. Can we not. By sharing that gospel.

With them. Save them. From a life. Of darkness. Can we not. Should we not. What we were. By nature. Then. Verses 19. Through 22. Secondly. Secondly. What we are. By grace. Verses 19. Through 22. What we are. By grace. It is difficult. To overestimate. How much. Hatred. Existed. Between Jew. And Gentile. And yet. Within the. Christian church.

In Ephesus. They didn't. Just coexist. They washed. Each other's feet. They became. Something. Which humanly. Was impossible. The two. Became one.

[14:51] The suspicion. With which. They eyed. One another. Was replaced. By love. In God's new society. The church. Something. Has happened.

To bring about. A seismic shift. In their relationship. To one another. And in verses. 19. Through 22. The apostle. Describes. Their relationship.

In God's new society. The church. In three ways. One body. One brotherhood. One building. He talks.

First of all. About. One body. This is in verse 15. I'm having to sneak. Slightly. Out of our verse range. For this. But in verse 15. Paul talks of how.

Through the death of Christ. One new man. Has been created. In place of the two. Whereas once. There were most definitely. Two peoples. Jews.

[15:47] And Gentiles. Now there's one. One. Just like in a marriage. Two become one. So in the church. Those worldly barriers. Which once divided us.

Like ethnicity. Like social class. Are destroyed. Such that we become. One body. In other letters. Of the New Testament. The apostle will expand.

On the idea of the church. Being a body. With many parts. Each of us. Having gifts. God wants us to use. For the benefit. Of the whole church. But here. In Ephesians 2.

His emphasis. Is upon how. Those who once. Were separated. From each other. And strangers. To each other. Are now one body. None of us.

I'm sure. Understands. The full implications. Of what the Bible. Is teaching us here. In the wealthy. West. We pride ourselves. On our independence.

[16:44] You're not going to tell me. What to do. We don't like being accountable. To anyone. The thing is. That God created us.

As human beings. For community. And relationship. Our longing. For belonging. Is written into our DNA. And this is what we can have. In God's new society. The church.

We're not a club. Into which. We may dip in. And out. According to our fancy. Or the emptiness. Or otherwise. Of our timetables. We are one body.

To which we belong. And in which. All of us. Whoever we are. The children included. Are equally important. The church is like. Unlike anything else.

In the whole world. Where its members. Of whatever background. Are so willingly. Committed to each other. In this. Wonderful community. Of love. And belonging.

[17 : 40] One body. Second. Verse 19. One brotherhood. One brotherhood. The household. Of God.

One brotherhood. To be far away from God. To be without hope. Is a most tragic thing. One cannot be more lost. And as such. So far away.

From the love. That could be theirs. A love that provides. And protects. A love that cherishes. And brings meaning. And security. That's the world. In which by nature.

We live. A world without God. And hopeless. But in verse 19. We're told. That through Christ. We're not just fellow.

Citizens of the kingdom of God. But we are members. Of his household. We are his. Family. Now for Jews and Gentiles.

[18 : 34] Think Ukrainians. And Russians. Okay. They live all together. There are separate existences. This is revolutionary. In God's new society. The church.

Through faith in Jesus. Those who once. Were at each other's throats. Now embrace. As brothers and sisters. They are family. Enjoying the provision. And protection of God.

They now have meaning. And security. As sons and daughters. Of the living God. The church. Has never been a building. We come to. This is the mistake.

That so many people make. The church. Is a family. We belong to. A brotherhood. A sisterhood. Of fellow Christians. United under the fatherhood.

Of God. And the lordship. Of Christ. You will know. That many in our society. Know nothing. About family love. Some come from abusive.

[19 : 28] Backgrounds. Where their parents. Were more interested. In their next fix. Than in their children. Or they come. From driven. Backgrounds. Where their parents.

Only loved them. On condition. That they. Did well. On their exams. Or made a success. Of themselves. The church.

Provides a home. For such as these. A real family. Where you are loved. And valued. For who you are. And your needs. And views. Are taken seriously.

This is what we offer here. A place where God. Will stretch his. Fatherly arms. Around us. And love us. Whoever we are.

This is what. We offer to Glasgow. This is what we offer. To each other. A real family. Which loves us. For who we are. And loves us. Unconditionally.

[20 : 26] A place where we can. Truly be ourselves. And then thirdly. In verses 20 through 22. We have one building.

One building. The single biggest symbol. Of the division. Between Jew and Gentile. Was the Jerusalem temple. It still is really. Jews were welcome.

But Gentiles excluded. From the innermost parts. On pain of death. But Paul now says. The temple isn't. A building anymore. However. The temple is a people.

We the church. God's new society. Are the temple of God. In which he by his Holy Spirit. Dwells in glorious power. What was once divisive.

Now. Unites both Jew and Gentile. Where we worship together. As one. As God's one building. God's one temple.

[21 : 28] Dare any of us imagine. That God is among us. Here today. In a way that he is. Nowhere else. In Glasgow. Of course. As Christians.

We believe. That God is everywhere. But he promises. To be here. Where his people. Are gathered together. To worship him. In a very special way. To use Old Testament language.

Language we were brought up with. From singing the Psalms. He inhabits. The praises of his people. He hears our prayers. He gives us words.

To speak. And he strengthens us. Through baptism and communion. You know. When we invite our friends. And our neighbors. To come to church. We could say to them.

Can I take you this morning. To where God is. We once were strangers. But now we're a family. We once were divided.

[22 : 23] But now we're one. We once were enemies. But now we're friends. Jewish Christians. And Gentile Christians. Joined together in Ephesus. To worship Jesus Christ. As one. With no divisions.

And no barriers. Gentile preachers. Ministered to Jewish believers. And Jewish believers. Served their Gentile Christian. Brothers and sisters.

They were one. And we're one with them. And we're one with God. Peace made between warring peoples. Peoples at war with God.

Peoples at war with each other. Peoples at war inside. And not a peace of compromise. Or one that papers over the cracks. But deep peace. Wider than the ocean.

And higher than the heavens. In a world that's at war. Do you long for peace like that? We'll find it here.

[23 : 17] We'll find it nowhere else. In God's new society. The church. And then finally. From verse 14 to 18.

How we got there. How we got there. Who we were by nature. Who we are by grace. How we got there. In the world outside the church. Jews and Gentiles were at each other's throats.

But in the church. Jews and Gentiles loved each other. In the world outside. Hostility. And rejection. Dominated human relationships.

With God. But in the church. Christians love and follow God. In the world outside. There were most definitely two. But in the church.

There's only one. One brotherhood. One body. One building. How was this diametric change. Taking place. Where does the church come from.

[24 : 16] Such that. Whereas before there was only war. Now there is. Peace. It is as we're told. In verses 14 through 18. All of Jesus Christ.

It's he and he alone. Who makes all the difference to us. In these verses. As we close. We're told three things about him. He is our peace. He is our preacher.

And he is our access. He is our peace. First of all. In verse 14. He's our peace. According to this verse. It is Christ who has made the two one.

It is Christ who in himself. Has created one new man. In place of the two. He did it by. Abolishing the law of commandments. Expressed in ordinances.

Now this is a reference to all the Jewish laws and regulations. Which kept them separate from the Gentiles. All the ceremonies of Judaism and temple worship. Which reinforced the distinction between.

[25 : 18] What it meant to be Jewish. And what it meant to be Gentile. Jesus has broken them all down. And as Paul calls it. At the end of verse 14. In the dividing wall of hostility.

And he's done it because he is the fulfillment. Of all the Old Testament shadows. And in him all the regulations. Governing Jewish religious purity. Are abolished.

In Jesus hostility. Which once existed between Jew and Gentile. Is forever destroyed. And he's done such a thing. As again we read at the end of verse 14. In his flesh.

In his flesh. What need is there for the ceremonial sacrifices of Judaism. When Jesus has in his flesh. Offered up the ultimate and final sacrifice for human sin.

It's in the flesh of Jesus. As he sacrificed himself for us as human beings. We are reconciled to one another. And everything that divides us. Is rendered utterly meaningless.

[26 : 24] But likewise. Not only in Jesus. Have Jew and Gentile. Been reconciled to each other. In verse 16. We read that. Sinful human beings. Have also been reconciled to God.

Through the cross. We were. Without hope. And without God in the world. But Jesus. Died on the cross. To take away our sins.

Thus. Removing. The barrier. Between a holy God. And a sinful humanity. We are forgiven.

We are reconciled. We are at one with God and all. Because 2,000 years ago. On a small hillock. Just outside the city of Jerusalem. A man called Jesus.

That has stretched out his arms. And allowed himself. To be nailed to a cross for us. Christ is our peace. And through him we have peace. Second verse 17.

[27 : 25] Christ is our preacher. Christ is our preacher. In this verse we are told. That Christ not only suffered for us. But now he preaches to us. He preaches. To those who are far off.

And to those who are near. Those who are far off. Being a reference to the Gentiles. The near being a reference to the Jews. And what he preaches. Is the peace that he has made. Between peoples. And the peace he has made.

Between peoples under God. He preaches the power of his blood. To take away all our sin. He preaches the power of his cross. To reconcile us.

He preaches the power of his flesh. To restore broken relationships. And inner sanity. He preaches his death. And as he does so. He appoints heralds.

Standing four square upon the truths of scripture. To invite sinful human beings. From whatever background. To be reconciled. Through faith in Christ. Jesus is preaching here today.

[28 : 26] Calling us to turn away from our hostility. And to embrace his peace. It's through the cross. All ethnic and class divisions are broken down.

And as that cross is preached. People learn to love one another. Robert E. Lee. Was the famous general of the confederate army of the south.

During the American civil war. Or the American war of southern defense. Or the American war of northern aggression. Whatever side you're on.

But it was an army fighting for the right of individual states. Which enforced the right to enforce slavery against black African Americans.

Well as we know. Thankfully the confederates were defeated. In his retirement. General Robert E. Lee worshipped in a church. Which contained both white Americans.

[29 : 29] And black Americans. When it came time for communion to be served. People watched to see. What General Robert E. Lee.

Would do. After all. He had been. The leader of the pro-slavery. Confederate. Army. Many thought. That he would walk out. In disgust at the prospect. Of having to take communion. With black. African. Former slaves. He surprised everybody.

When he and his family. Stood up. And were the first. To receive the bread. And the wine of the communion. Along with his fellow black. African American Christians.

There we are. The trembling white hands. Of General Robert E. Lee. And beside him. The trembling black hand.

[30 : 27] Of a former slave. The gospel of Jesus Christ. You see. The peace Jesus made on the cross. Had so worked in Robert E. Lee's heart.

That it had removed. The distinction. Between ethnicities. Colors. And classes. This is what the cross. Always does. When it's preached. It makes peace.

Between peoples. By making peace. First of all. With God. And then finally. Christ. Our access. Christ.

Our peace. Christ. Our preacher. Christ. Our access. The innermost. Temple. This is in verse 18. The innermost temple. Was constructed. In such a way. As to prevent access.

To God. To all but one. The Jewish high priest. The thought. That an unclean Gentile. Could ever enter. Into the holiest place. In all Judaism.

[31 : 26] The symbol. Of the earthly presence. Of God. Was enough. To drive a Jewish person. Mad. But now. Through the cross. Of Jesus Christ. Christ. Both Jew.

And Gentile. Have direct access. To God. By his spirit. And direct access. You'll notice. From the very wording. Of verse 18. To God.

As. Father. Every human being. Has the right. Through. Faith in Jesus Christ. And by his spirit. To go. From being. Separated. From God. And entirely. Without hope. In the world. To getting. Nearer. To God. Than any. Jewish high priest.

Could ever. Have dreamed. For what. As all. That Jewish high priest. Ever saw. And did. Was symbolic. What we have. In Jesus. And by his spirit.

[32 : 20] Is the reality. Moment. By moment. Through faith. In Christ. We have access. To God. As our father. Even as he is.

The father. Of Jesus. Of whatever. Background. Former black slave. In Carolina. Or former confederate general.

Whatever our native language. Whatever our social class. We can really know God. For who he is. And experience the vastness. Of his love for us.

Moment. By moment. Second. By second. Second. We may speak to him in prayer. Even as he speaks to us. Through his word. And all because. Christ. Is our continual access.

The church. The church. Is God's new society. It is heaven's embassy. Of peace on earth. In Scotland.

[33 : 15] We say. If it's not already raining. It's going to rain. As Christians. When the gospel of Jesus Christ. Is preached. For the blood of Jesus.

Offered to take away. All our sin. Is proclaimed. We say. Peace. Glorious peace. Deep peace. Has been made for me. On the cross.

By Jesus my Lord. Are we forfeiting. The peace that could be ours today. By consciously rejecting the gospel. Or do we want what Jesus.

Has to offer us today. Jesus offers us. Peace in the storm. An end to war with God. An end to war with other people.

An end to war within. Then listen. All those. Of us who are far off. And all those of us who are near. Believe and trust. In what Jesus Christ.

[34 : 10] Has done on the cross. And take your place. Alongside every Christian. Of any background. In this church. And see along with them.

As with Christians everywhere. All over our world today. And both past and present. Christ alone. Christ alone.

Is my peace. Let us pray. We worship and praise you. Oh Lord. That whereas once we had no hope.

And we were without you in the world. Now through faith in Jesus. We have continual access to you. We may draw closer to you.

Than the Jewish high priest. Could ever have dreamed. For whereas all he did. Was symbolic. And a shadow. Now what we have is the reality. Of intimacy. In our relationship with you.

[35 : 09] We pray for any here today. Who are not at peace. Because they are not yet. At peace with you. We ask and pray. That you would. Speak powerfully. That Jesus would be the preacher.

Of this message. Into our hearts. We ask all these things. In Jesus name. Amen.