

He is Our Peace

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[0 : 0 0] But as humans, we often long for peace in life, don't we? Whether it's peace in the workplace or peace in the home, especially as this lockdown drags on, or whether it's peace in the world, like in Afghanistan or Myanmar.

This year actually marks 50 years since John Lennon wrote his hit song, Imagine. Some of the lyrics are on your screens. Imagine all the people living life in peace. You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us and the world will be as one. You see, like most people, he longed for peace in life. Well, today, Paul reminds us that we have peace in Christ. This is part of our privileged place in Christ.

I remember the first half of this letter is about helping us to see our privileged place in God's plan, a plan that's centered on Christ.

[1 : 1 5] Hence, on the title slide on your screen, we've just got the series logo, but there's also a cross in the middle, in the circle. I don't know if you've ever noticed that.

It's in Christ. And so chapter one, we saw the blessings that matter are the ones that we have in Christ. And then Paul prayed we might really know with our hearts, the hip, you know, our hope in Christ.

God's inheritance, which is us in Christ. And God's power to help us live this life for Christ. And then last week, we saw God's grace in Christ, that once we were dead in sin, but now made alive in Christ.

Raised, seated and secure in Christ. All by God's grace, his great generosity to us who don't deserve it.

Last week ended with the verse just before this week on your screens. For we are God's handiwork, God's new creation created to do good works.

[2 : 2 3] We'll see some of those good works in the second half of the letter. But as Vijay said last week, that's the story dead to alive for each of us as individuals in Christ.

But this week, Paul unpacks what it means for us as a people and not individually, but corporately. That we are not just a new individual, but a new people.

That's why he starts verse 11 with the word therefore. Therefore, in light of what God has done for each of you as individuals, remember what this now means for you.

As a people. Firstly, by remembering who we once were. So point one, verse 11. Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, which is done in the body by human hands.

Now, just to explain in the Jewish mindset, there are only two types of people in the whole world. There are Jews who had the mark of circumcision. Well, the men did.

[3 : 3 9] And there are non-Jews or Gentiles like us who are called the uncircumcised. You're either one or the other. And Paul says to us Gentile people, remember who you once were.

Verse 12. Remember that at that time you, we were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in the world. You see, as a people, we were once separate from Christ, which is at the top of the list, because no Christ means no citizenship with Israel.

No part in God's promised future. No hope and no God in the world. You see, before Christ, before being a Christian, we were once no hopers and distant outsiders.

I don't know if you've ever been excluded by a group or left out by others. I remember at high school, there was a class party and a lot of my friends were invited to the party, but I was not.

[4 : 54] It hurts, doesn't it? It can make us feel like a no hoper, can't it? A distant outsider. Well, before Christ, that's who we were because of our sin.

Our sin made us no hopers and distant outsiders. Though we probably didn't realize it back then. But Paul says, remember it now.

So that we might realize our privileged place in Christ now. That's why Paul says, remember, remember what a no hoper we were, a distant outsider.

So you'll see how good it is to be in Christ now. Because point two, that's where we are. Point two, verse 13.

You see, we who are once far away have been brought near in Christ.

[6 : 02] Now, before Paul unpacks just how good that is, just how privileged a place that is, he explains how it happened.

How Christ's blood has brought us near. Because in verse 14, it starts with the word for or because. So verse 14. Because he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one.

You see, Christ is our peace.

He brings us near by making the two groups one. How? Well, his death has brought down the wall that divided us and created hostility between us.

That's what walls do, don't they? They divide and create hostility. Just think of Trump's war between the US and Mexico. Or even our state borders in Australia at the moment.

[7 : 16] Our closed borders are like walls that divide us and are creating tension and hostility between our political leaders, aren't they? Or the wall between Israel and Palestine, which is quite tall, isn't it?

As you can see there. And it runs for miles. Look how far it goes. It's supposed to bring peace, but it actually incites violence, which is why there are calls for it to be brought down and to reboot the way to peace.

In computer language, as you can see, Control-Alt-Delete is a way of rebooting your computer.

Well, it is for PC users. And not for us Apple Mac users.

Our computers are better. Tim Walker is about to mute me because he is a PC guy. But the point is, that's what Christ has done to the wall that divided Jews and Gentiles.

He brought it down and rebooted the way to peace. And so what was this wall? Well, it was the Old Testament law. The Ten Commandments with all its ordinances.

[8 : 28] It taught the Jews to live separately from the Gentile nations. By telling the Jews who to worship, what to eat, how to treat one another.

Now, this law was given by God and is good. It showed them how to live well, how to love, and how to be righteous before God.

And it made Israel a light that would attract the Gentiles to God. As Moses said to Israel on your screens there, the law will make them seem wise and understanding to the Gentile nations.

It would attract the Gentiles to Israel, to God. And the Jews were then to welcome the Gentiles in.

But instead, it made the Jews think they were superior to the Gentiles and keep them out.

In fact, the Jews added more laws that God did not give, like laws that said you could not even eat with Gentiles, which created more hostility between them.

[9 : 33] And the irony, of course, is that like us, the Jews couldn't keep all of God's law themselves. And like us, they kept sinning. And because they couldn't keep the law themselves, then it separated them from God too.

It created hostility between them and God as well. So although the law is good, the sinfulness of people meant it created hostility.

A horizontal hostility between Jews and Gentiles, and a vertical hostility between people and God.

But when Christ died on the cross, he paid for those sins, our sins, to make us righteous before God.

He pressed control, alt, delete, and rebooted the way to be right with God. Not by law, but by his blood.

The law is still good and still teaches us things about God, so we don't rip our Old Testaments out of the Bible. But verse 15 says that Christ has set aside the law in his flesh by his death at the cross.

[10 : 49] His death replaced the law as the way to be right with God. And it did it for all people, both Jew and Gentile. And his purpose in this was to bring us together.

To recreate us, not just as individuals, as we saw in verse 10, but as one new people who have peace with one another.

So the rest of verse 15 says, His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, Jew and Gentile, thus making peace between us.

You see, both groups are now made right with God through one person, Jesus. And by both groups, Jew and Gentile coming to Christ, they come together as one.

One new humanity called Christian. That's like this on your screens. There's Jesus in the middle. And we were, you know, Australian, Chinese, Persian, Indonesian, Sri Lankan, or we followed Collingwood or Essendon or go for cricket instead.

[12:03] But if we press play, as we come to Christ, on the screen, hopefully this works. Here we go.

As we come to Christ, we are united in Christ as one new people. I worked hard on that. But notice we still keep parts of our old identity, not our sinfulness, but, you know, we're still Australian, Sri Lankan, and so on.

We still like footy or cricket. But our new identity in Christ has superseded our old divisions in life. And that brings us peace with one another.

Because we're all now on the same side. We're all now in Christ. And so we are to live out that peace we already have in Christ.

And 2019 marked the 25th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, where in a hundred days, Hutus killed more than 800,000 Tutsis.

[13:11] I mentioned back then that one Hutu who took part in the killings was a man called Calixti. You can see him on this screen. He and his wife, Marcella, were neighbours and best friends of Andrew and Madrine.

Andrew is the one on the left and Calixti on the right, as you can see there. But Madrine was a Tutsi and Andrew a Tutsi lover. And so Calixti murdered Madrine's parents and her five siblings.

Only Madrine escaped. Calixti went to prison and Andrew hated him. Calixti spent a lot of time in grief and remorse.

He repented and became a Christian. When he got out, he and Marcella found themselves at the same church service as Andrew and Madrine.

They heard about Christ who brings forgiveness with God and peace with each other. And so after the service, they said, as you can see, we've got to talk. Andrew practised then the peace that they had in Christ and forgave Calixti.

[14:24] You see, their new identity in Christ was bigger than their old divisions in life, even bigger than their hurt. It enabled them to forgive and to practise the peace they have in Christ.

In fact, as you can see on the screen there, they can even hold hands as brothers instead of being filled with bitterness. Our church is full of people from many different backgrounds who wouldn't normally give two hoots about each other.

But now, because we are joined together in Christ, we are unified and have peace with each other in Christ, we do care for one another.

This was his purpose. Remember verse 15? To unite us together in him as one new humanity and so bring horizontal peace between one another and verse 16, to bring vertical peace between us and God.

Do you see verse 16? And his purpose is in one body to reconcile both of them, Jew and Gentile, to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility.

[15:48] One of the most moving scenes coming out of Afghanistan the other week was that Air Force plane trying to take off from Kabul airport.

Do you remember this scene? Sadly, only those who got in the plane were saved from the Taliban. They had peace from the hostility created by the Taliban.

And by getting into that one plane, they were also united and had peace with each other, as you can see on the screen. There was no hostility between those in the plane, was there?

It didn't matter if they were Afghan or American. What mattered was being in the plane. Christ is like the plane.

He saves us from the hostility created not by the Taliban, but by our sin, which brings vertical peace with God. And Christ saves us from the hostility with one another, bringing us horizontal peace with one another.

[16:54] Because again, what matters is not the old divisions of Jew and Gentile, but being in Christ, in the plane. This was always God's plan.

Do you remember in chapter 1, we saw that? His plan was always to unite all things in Christ. And we'll see God's plan again next week.

We also know as part of God's plan from our Old Testament reading this week, where he preaches peace to those far and near. That's a heal relationships we heard.

And so verse 17 and 18 on your screens. He came and preached peace to you who are far away, as we heard in the Old Testament, peace to those who are near.

For through Christ, we both have access to the Father by one spirit. You see, Christ is our peace. He brings that double peace, vertical peace with God, horizontal peace with one another.

[17:58] And so we now not only have access to God in prayer, but we're now no longer distant outsiders, nor no hopers.

We're close insiders and family members. Point 3, verse 19. So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people, and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

You see, back in verse 12, before Christ, we were not citizens with Israel, but now in Christ, we are fellow citizens with Israel. Before Christ, we're foreigners to God's promises, but now in Christ, we are family members of his household.

You see, without Christ, we were no hopers, distant outsiders, but now in Christ, we are family members and close insiders.

So close that God lives in us. Verse 21. In Christ, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

[19:18] And in him, you two are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit. You see, we are God's very temple because God's spirit lives in each of us who believe.

You can't get any closer to God this side of heaven, can you? This is our privileged place in Christ. It's like we've gone from relational rags to relational riches.

Most of you will have heard of the musical and movie called Annie. She was an orphan who had a hard knock life. She had no family and was excluded, kept far from society, without any real hope, because no one wanted to adopt her.

But then she was adopted by Mr. Warbucks, you might remember, the so-called God of New York. And she was brought into his family with access to Mr. Warbucks, whom she ends up calling Daddy.

That's our spiritual journey. From rags to riches. From no-hopers and distant outsiders because of our sin, to family members and closest insiders because of Christ.

[20:38] So by way of application, reap like Jeep. Nothing to do with the car, just helps us to remember to reap. On your screens, remember, express, exercise and pray.

Remember who we once were, that we might continue to thank God for who we now are in Christ. I know many of us are feeling this lockdown and we're not just feeling the restrictions and fatigue, but also the separation, aren't we?

Because we were made for relationships. Not just with friends and family, but with Christian family too. If you're not missing your church family face to face, then perhaps we need to work harder to get to know one another.

But if you are feeling that separation, then use it for good. Every time you feel it, let it remind you that this is what we once were without Christ.

Separate. Excluded. Use it to help you remember what you once were, that you might continue to thank God for who we now are in Christ. In any terms, remember we were once relationally in rags, that you might thank God for making us relationally rich in Christ.

[22:02] Remember. Second, express. Express our unity in Christ. I realize again, this is hard to do at the moment, isn't it? We cannot meet together to express our unity as family, but we can express it by caring for one another as family.

Whether by phone calls or messages or cards or even treats. Someone in my Bible study group said to me last week that Mark, Vijay and I cannot do it all.

I really wish I could. I was hoping to have chocolates here for Father's Day today, but I cannot tell you to leave your houses to come to church because the church office is not meant to be open.

I can't do it all. We can't do it all. But more than that, we're not supposed to do it all. Part of expressing our unity as family is that we all express it a bit together.

And so can I encourage you this month, why not make one extra phone call each week during September to one other church member to see how they're going?

[23 : 13] One extra call than you'd normally make, even if that's zero calls to one call. Email me if you need numbers. Let's express our unity by caring for one another as family.

And can I say thank you to those who already are doing that? I was visiting someone last week who was still in pain due to surgery. So it was a legal pastoral care visit, just saying.

But they mentioned how lots of people had called them to see how they were going. That's so encouraging, isn't it? And I know others who've dropped off plates of slices or food.

That's so brilliant. In fact, I got three surprises last week. Someone dropped off chocolates. Another arranged for a delivery of nuts. As you can see on their screen, there was actually a lot more nuts than that originally.

They're going fast. And another person arranged for some doughnuts with a note that said, a bit of sunshine in lockdown. And they were fancy doughnuts at that. And so we're all good now.

[24 : 19] Okay, we're okay. Thank you. But the point is we can express our unity in Christ as family by caring and calling, can't we?

And when we can, by meeting together as family. So express our unity. And third, exercise our peace.

This is where Paul goes with the passage later in the letter. And we're to make every effort to keep exercising, sorry, keep the unity of our faith by exercising our bond of peace.

How? Well, as it says there, by patiently bearing with one another in love. At the moment, this means when we meet on Zoom and they've forgotten to unmute themselves yet again and they're, you know, talking, they can't hear.

We don't harass them, but patiently bear with them. Or if they express a political view we disagree with, then we don't try to mute them, but patiently bear with them.

[25 : 23] Or if we're calling others, but they're not calling us, we don't get upset, but patiently bear with them. Or for families, if people in your house are annoying you because you're all tired of being cooped up together, then we're to patiently bear with them.

In fact, I heard about one family who during the school holidays, these ones coming, have decided they're going to go camping in their backyard just to get out of the house. And when we do meet together, you know, if someone takes your seat in church, if you can even remember where that was, it's been so long, we don't get upset, but we patiently bear with them.

We're to make every effort to exercise the peace we already have in Christ. And lastly, we're to pray for world peace. John Lennon also wrote in his song on your screens, imagine there's no countries that isn't hard to do, nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too.

He saw how religion could create conflict and hostility, and some religions do, but Christ does not. He doesn't tell us to use violence, but to show love.

And those who have done wrong in Christ's name, they were not following Christ, they were following their own sinful desires. Which means it's really our sin and selfishness that creates the hostility and conflict between both people and God.

[26 : 58] But because Christ's blood paid for our sin, he brings real peace, both horizontal and vertical. And so pray for world peace by praying that Christ is proclaimed.

He's the one that brings real peace. Last Wednesday was our monthly prayer night via Zoom, and we prayed for Afghanistan, using some helpful prayer points from some mission agencies.

But I realized afterwards, we didn't actually pray that Christ would be proclaimed even in Afghanistan. Yes, we should pray Christians there will be protected, but we should also pray that they might have opportunities to share Christ.

For he is the one who dealt with sin. And so he is the one that can bring real peace, both between people and between God. Christ is our peace.

So reap like Jeep. Remember who we once were, that we might thank God for who we now are. Express our unity by caring and calling.

[28 : 07] One extra call per week this month. Exercise our peace by patiently bearing. And pray for world peace by praying that Christ is proclaimed.

Let's pray now. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for Christ Jesus. We thank you that in him we have peace.

Peace with you and peace with one another. And so help us, we pray, to live in light of it by remembering who we once were, that we might thank you for who we now are.

By expressing our unity through caring for one another. By exercising our peace, patiently bearing with each other.

And by praying for world peace through prayer that Christ is proclaimed. And so we do pray that Christ Jesus would be proclaimed even in Afghanistan at the moment.

[29 : 12] That people might know true peace in Christ. We ask it in his name. Amen.