

One Body

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Date: 01 June 2008

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[0 : 00] As we stand, let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for the gift of peace that Jesus Christ gives to all those who place their trust in him.

We pray, Father, that we would know this peace that passes all understanding that is not the peace that the world can give. As we look at your word this morning, we pray that your Holy Spirit would bring into our hearts this marvelous truth that in Jesus we have access to our loving Father.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen. Please be seated. We're continuing our series on Ephesians 2 and I invite you to turn to page 181, a right-hand column.

And we're going to look just until verse 18 and give David a chance to preach the rest of the chapter next week. As you're turning there, I want to talk about walls of hostility because it comes up here in the passage.

Back in the 1980s, I visited East and West Berlin two times. And at that time, the distinctive feature of these cities really was this dividing wall that ran between them, the Berlin Wall.

[1 : 28] And as a tourist, you are attracted to that just as you might be attracted to looking at a train wreck or something awful that has taken place on the news. When I went there, I was struck by the ugliness of this wall.

A very uncreative concrete barrier that had a big open no-man's land that cut the city right in half. And the cruel thing about that wall was it was designed not to protect the city, which of course most walls are for.

It was actually designed to keep people in, to imprison them. And many people, as you know, have been killed trying to overcome that wall.

It was a real wall of hostility. It was a symbol of division of families, of repression of one's own people. It is a sign of violence.

And really, it was a monument to human sin and hostility. Both times that I was there, going back and forth between East and West Berlin and going through the checkpoints and so forth, I was struck by the awfulness of what that all meant.

[2 : 45] It was a very sobering experience each time I did it. Now, come forward to the end of the 1980s, November 9th, 1989.

On that day, the East German government, after months of mass civil unrest, decided to allow people to visit the West freely. And you had this incredible contrast of the very opposite of hostility that took place.

Because when the announcement was made, people immediately began to destroy the wall. And hundreds of thousands of people from all over Europe came to Berlin, to that place where the wall was.

And millions of Berliners all came in as well, to the center of the city. And there was this incredibly huge, joyous party, with lots of tears and lots of joy.

This massive contrast from the hostility of just the day before. And of course, as you know, since that day, the city has been transformed.

[3 : 51] I wouldn't probably recognize much of it if I went back. And the country has been reunified. This is a little picture of what Paul is talking about in this passage.

Because you sense, as you read the passage, of Paul's deep and heartfelt joy, because Jesus has destroyed the fundamental wall that is far more deadly and divisive.

It's a wall so strong that no power on earth could put a dent in it. It's a wall that is between Jews and Gentiles. A wall that is between humanity and God.

And it's not that God destroyed all walls in Christ. Because, of course, human sin is still very much a factor that we experience. And we still see things just as awful as the Berlin Wall.

But here's the fundamental thing that changes us in our relationship with God and our relationship with fellow Christians. It is the fundamental wall that Paul says Jesus has destroyed completely.

[4 : 56] Now, verse 11 and 12 describe this wall. And I invite you to look at this. Because it tells us in verse 11 that Gentiles who made up most of the church were called the uncircumcision.

Not a complementary term. It was saying that they were profane. That they were people who should have nothing to do with God or the things of God. And God should not speak to them.

And so, as a profane people, you have a pretty sobering list in verse 12. There's five things about the people.

That Paul reminds them. This is what you were. Here's how awful the wall is. It says that you were separated from Christ, first of all. In other words, they were separated from all the blessings that we heard described in chapter 1 where every spiritual blessing comes to us from Jesus Christ.

The blessing of being chosen by God from before the foundation of the world. The blessing of being redeemed, set free by His blood. The blessing of the forgiveness of sins that Jesus gives.

[6 : 02] The blessing of God dwelling within us by His Holy Spirit. The seal of what Jesus has done in you. You're separated from that.

Secondly, He says to them that you were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. In other words, they didn't know the loving rule of God. They would not be able to hear God speak to them as their God.

And they as His people. And then thirdly, there were strangers to the covenant of promise. So all the things that actually made life real and made life purposeful, which was the covenant of hope for Israel, Gentiles were not included in it.

In fact, they didn't know about it. All their hopes were confined to what this world alone could offer. And that goes to number four, having no hope.

They didn't know what God's saving plan was. That there was a purpose that God has for all that happens in history. He is in control of it. And He is bringing all things to be under the lordship of Jesus Christ, which is what we heard about in chapter one.

[7 : 17] That hope simply didn't exist for them. And finally, He says about this wall that you were without God in the world.

At the end of verse 12. There were a huge number of gods that the Ephesians would have had to choose from. No shortage of religion in Ephesus.

But they would have known that gods that were there did not satisfy the human heart. They would have known that these were not living gods that they were serving. In fact, they probably may have even known they were serving their own desires.

And their own wishes. But there's no true knowledge of a relationship of one who created us, loves us, and has saved us, and who speaks to us by His word.

Without God in this world. This is a description of profound separation from God. And from people who know God. It's really a picture of life without the things that Christians value most.

[8 : 22] So if you go back and look at verse 12, it is a terrible picture. It is something that ought to strike dread in our hearts.

And if it does, then it is a sign of your living faith in Jesus Christ. Because for many in Vancouver who don't know the Lord, this description is irrelevant.

It really would not trouble many people. But Paul tells us this to remind us of what we have been saved from. To tell us about the fundamental change that has taken place in your life.

That you would value these things that were not part of your life before Christ. Now wonderfully, in verse 13, there is a transformation.

There is a huge change that is signaled in two words. Those two words signal the destruction of the wall of separation between us and God. And between those who know the Lord.

[9 : 24] It says, But now. And those two words mean that the opposite of verse 12 is true for those who have faith in Jesus. So he says, But now, in Christ, you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ.

And I think this is actually something that Vancouverites could relate to. I think every human, unless people are in denial, have a desire to be near to God.

How often have you heard people say, I don't need to go to church. I can be, I feel close to God on the water, on the golf course, in the cafe, drinking a coffee with lots of caffeine in it.

I feel close to God when I'm hiking or enjoying the mountains that are around. I don't need to be with the people of God. But you see, what they are really describing is not being near to God.

They are describing an experience of God existing, that there is a God. But what Paul is talking about here is being near to God in the sense of having a living relationship with Him.

[10 : 37] A relationship that can only happen because Jesus' blood is shed on the cross. And here's the uniqueness of Christianity, of the gospel message, that the power of the cross is that people are brought near into relationship with God.

And so actually, the opposite of verse 12 is true for those who have faith in Christ. So if you look at verse 12 again, those five things, it actually means that we are being united with Christ.

We have been united to Him. That's what baptism was about when we heard the testimony last Sunday. That was a testimony of being united to Christ and the difference that makes.

Secondly, because Jesus' blood is shed, we are citizens of the family of God. If you were to jump down to verse 19 that David's going to preach on, you'll see that. It's the very opposite of being not a people at all, but you are actually citizens of the family of God.

And thirdly, what you see in verse 12 is that we are strangers to the covenant of promise.

[11 : 52] But in Christ, there is something very different that is taking place because you're actually brought into the covenant of promises. The things that we learned about in the Old Testament in Genesis and Exodus are for you.

Jesus has fulfilled them for you. We saw this as we heard God promise that He would be our God and that we would be His people, that we would be brought into the place of blessing and that the nations of the earth would be blessed by the people of God.

These covenant promises are ours because of Jesus Christ. And then fourthly, far from having no hope, we have a certain hope that God will finish His plan to save us, that the work that He has started in you and me will be brought to completion as we see everything being brought under Jesus' loving rule.

And finally, the last thing is not having God in the world, far from that, nothing in this world can now separate us from the love of God because of Jesus Christ.

And here are the blessings of Christ. These are our treasures. This is what every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places are. And only Jesus can give them. And so I would encourage you not to bury those treasures or to forget about them, but to keep them out where you can see them.

[13 : 20] Look at verse 12 and see, God has done the opposite for me in Jesus Christ. This gives us grateful hearts. It leads us to good works in Christ.

Now, if we continue into verse 14, we go deeper into what Jesus has done by His blood in bringing us near to God. It puts it this way.

It says, He Himself is our peace. And that word peace is critical in this passage. It's mentioned three times in the next four verses. It's fundamental to what Jesus has done for us.

It's not a peace that is about rearranging our schedules so that we're more relaxed, trying to deal with our stress, having times of recreation, having times where we are able to back away from the world.

This is not what this is about. It has to do with changed relationships. It has to do with ending hostility in our relationships, and particularly our relationship with God and with fellow Christians.

[14 : 26] So Paul first mentions the peace that affects them on a daily basis in church life, because this is what we relate to. In verse 14, he said that He has made us both one.

And that's a remarkable phrase. He has made us both one. He is saying that the Jews and Gentiles in the church are one people. This would have been a shocking statement for Jews and Gentiles, Gentiles inside and outside the church, because it's very hard for us to imagine how deep and how awful the dividing wall was between these two peoples.

The Gentiles were considered to be spiritually unclean and subhuman. In today's world, probably the closest example would be the division between militant Muslims and Jewish settlers.

There was a barrier that was beyond any earthly power to take away. But Jesus, it says here, on the cross, dismantled that dividing wall of hostility.

And at the same time, what He did, it says here, is to unite those people so strongly and completely that they are one entity, one organism.

[15 : 39] It's the language of marriage. He makes the two to be one. And that's a remarkable thing to teach the church. How did this happen?

How did this incredible transformation happen among these people? Well, Paul wants them to know it is centered on Jesus Christ. It's centered on His cross.

And there are three things that Jesus does on the cross. The first thing, at the beginning of verse 15, it says that He abolished in His flesh the law of commandments and ordinances.

And that doesn't mean that the law became irrelevant, that you just throw it out. In fact, Jesus came to fulfill the law. And Paul talks about honoring your father and mother in chapter 6.

But when Jesus came, when Jesus came, the law no longer became the way of salvation or the thing that separates Jews from Gentiles.

[16 : 43] What happened with Jesus is that He obeyed the law in the place of both Jews and Gentiles who really can't and couldn't because of sin. And Jesus suffered the consequences of their disobedience in their place on the cross.

and therefore God accepts people through faith now in Jesus alone, whether they are Jew or whether they are Gentile. This is what it means that He abolished the law that could divide people and keep people from God.

Now the second thing that Jesus did on the cross, it's the last half of verse 15. It says, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.

And here is the recreation that has happened. He creates a new person. And that is because a person is saved only through faith in Jesus, Paul is teaching, not by trying to keep the law.

Everyone is in the same boat spiritually. They are all people in need of the grace of God to fundamentally change their relationships. relationships. And they together trust in Jesus alone for their salvation so that through that faith, Jesus unites people together, makes them new, and a new organism, as I said.

[18 : 07] One of the fantastic blessings at St. John's is that we have a number of connections with missionaries around the world. And one of the great benefits of that relationship is that we are able to come in contact with many different cultures in the world.

And people from different walks of life, different backgrounds, who serve the same Christ, who have been saved in the same way that you and I have been saved. And so that when you meet them, it becomes very clear, quickly, that we have a pre-existing relationship that is actually made in Jesus Christ.

And it only exists because we have the same Savior, the only forgiver of our sin, the only one who can bring us near to God. We have that in common.

And that breaks down anything that would naturally divide us. It reveals that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. That's a marvelous thing to experience.

And that really brings us to the third thing that Jesus did on the cross to get rid of enmity. verse 16 says that he reconciled us both, Jew and Gentile, to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

[19 : 26] You see, here we get down to what the true source of all real peace is. It's saying here that incredibly different people who are deeply divided naturally, as two groups can be, and spiritually, they are both reconciled to God in one body.

In other words, both Jew and Gentile have a common problem. They actually each need a mediator. Not only is there hostility between them, there is a deeper hostility between them and God.

And of course, God is deeply hostile to sin. And everyone, no matter what their religious background, needs to be reconciled to him. And the marvelous thing that Paul is saying is that there is a movement that takes place, that God brings people together as they together are being reconciled to him through Jesus Christ.

And that process of reconciliation, as they are brought near to God, actually crushes every wall that is between these people. And of course, it crushes the wall that was between them and God as well.

It's a very powerful thing that the Holy Spirit is accomplishing in the lives of Christians. Destroying anything that would separate.

[20 : 46] Now you see, what this means practically is incredibly important for us. Because it means that divisions have no place in God's plans for Christians.

In Ephesus or here in Vancouver in 2008. In fact, John 17, we hear Jesus pray. And his prayer is very powerful.

And what he prays for is that people would be united in the truth. The truth of who he is. The truth of his gospel. And this affects us today.

Many of you are wondering, well, how does unity that Jesus is praying for, how does that apply to our situation at St. John's? Especially as we have joined the Anglican network in Canada.

And I want you to know that the reason why we have stood firm, the reason why we have taken action to be a network, is that if we did not do so, we would not have been united with biblical Christians in the Anglican communion.

[21 : 58] Nor would we be united with those who profess the faith of Jesus Christ in every denomination throughout the world. In fact, if we had stayed and let the status quo just continue, a wall would have slowly been built up between us and other people who believe in Jesus Christ.

And that is why it not only grieves us, it grieves God to see the local diocese and the Anglican Church of Canada set up walls of hostility against him and against his people.

You see, unity is the precious gift that Jesus has given to the church. He has made us one body. And we must guard against divisions that go against God's plan to bring all things under Jesus' rule.

One of the great blessings in the last month or so was to see and be part of the network conference down in Delta. Delta. Because one of the things we saw was a deep unity of people who come from different, very different backgrounds.

But to see people together because of the truth of Jesus Christ was a great blessing. And yet right now I believe that this is something that we must work to maintain.

[23 : 17] Work with the Holy Spirit to continue. Because the place we are most susceptible to division is within our own congregation. It is within the network that has just begun.

It's a tool of Satan to disrupt the mission of the church. It's very interesting that the unification of Germany immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall meant cultural change.

And it wasn't easy. And in fact in September 2004 a poll found that 25% of West Germans and 12% of East Germans wished that East and West Germany were again cut off by the Berlin Wall.

Imagine that. One in five of all Germans. This is a shocking statistic. And I think that those who were asked probably didn't fully realize what it would mean to erect that wall.

But it shows how sin can easily entangle us. And it's an illustration of what can happen to us. Because a desire for our own agenda can push out patience and love with those who differ from us.

[24 : 26] And we will have differences. We in a sense want to go back to the wall as destructive as it was. Not realize fully what that means. And so that's why Paul gives to us Ephesians 4, 1 through 3.

And I'd like you just to turn the page. The bottom of page 182. And he tells us that God has united us. Therefore continue in that unity.

I think this is a good little section to memorize. He says this. He says, I, chapter 4, verse 1. I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Which is to be united to one another in Christ. With all lowliness and meekness. With patience, forbearing one another in love. Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Isn't that interesting? That maintain is a key word. It's an active word. It means that we are called to cultivate the unity God has given to us. Be eager for the unity of the Holy Spirit, he says.

[25 : 36] Do everything to preserve it. It's part of our witness. It's to the world. Part of our preaching to the world. And that's why things, what is brought to a close in our passage have to do with Jesus being our powerful peace through preaching.

And I want you to look at this because here is our witness to the world. Chapter 2, verse 17. It says, Jesus came and he preached peace to you who were far and peace to those who were near.

For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. Now this is how we close this passage because it is really an application for us.

It is a challenge to us. The first words that Jesus said to his disciples were, peace be with you. And that was really in a sense the first sermon.

And Jesus was proclaiming the good news of who he was. He is our peace. Now for the Ephesians, they didn't have Jesus. How did he preach to them?

[26 : 50] Well it was through Paul that they heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is through our sharing of what Paul has said in his word that peace in the world today is preached.

The peace of Jesus Christ. Every time you and I talk about Jesus and his gospel, about Jesus being our peace, Jesus is actually preaching through us.

He is preaching through God's word and as we share that he is preaching through us. And it is a wonderful responsibility that when we speak about Jesus, he preaches his peace through us.

Now how do we, you know, what moves us to preach in that way, to share and to bring God's peace to the world?

Well the great benefit of peace with God is in our last verse. It says that we both have access to God. And that word access has to do with permission to enter an exclusive area, the throne room of a leader, of a ruler.

[27 : 56] But we have a surprise that happens. We see that we have access to God who is not only a king, but he is our father as well through Jesus in the Holy Spirit.

Here is the love of the Trinity opening the way for us to know God as our loving father. And this is actually the message of peace that we are bringing to those around us and to one another as well.

It says that we are near him through Jesus Christ. We have peace with God because of it. And very powerfully for us, our brothers and sisters in Christ are there with us too.

We are near to Jesus Christ. We are near to our heavenly father. This is the gift of grace. This is the gift of Jesus being our peace. And this is what a gift that we do not keep for ourselves.

So may that fact transform you. thoroughly in your speech and in your actions. May that fact of access to our God as heavenly father be the incentive to allow Jesus to preach peace through you to those who are near and to those who are far and to know the glorious of unit, the glorious gift of unity in the truth of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 16] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Please kneel to pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning with thanksgiving for so many things.

we thank you for the beauty and abundance of your creation we witness here at this time of year keep us mindful that this bounty of beauty is made possible only by your loving provision and help our hearts to be thankful to you lord in your mercy we are thankful for this country for our freedom to worship you for an orderly government and for civic peace we pray for all those who govern us guide and direct them in your ways so where our country is in error it will be corrected and where it is advancing your will it will be strengthened we pray especially for those in our city and country who do not enjoy many of the privileges and riches that we do compel our hearts to reach out to them compel our leaders to address their issues of poverty justice homelessness and disease protect those who are vulnerable and stir up those who are in positions to make a difference to further your desire for peace and a just community lord in your mercy we pray now for all the places around the world that do not share in so many of our gifts we pray for those living under tyranny and oppression those ravaged by earthquakes floods wars famine and disease send into their midst your saints bolster embolden and empower those who work to bring your love and justice to the world we pray especially for the earthquake ravaged areas of china we give thanks for the great outpouring of aid and love offered by so many from both within china and from around the world we pray especially for the large group of chinese christians who have rushed in to help be with them as they bring both practical aid and even more importantly your great message of the love of christ to this area that has lost so much of their hope we pray for those in burma we continue to pray that either their government would welcome the world aid being offered or that the world would find a way to deliver that aid anyway we do not even know the magnitude of the need but we know you do we pray you will guard and protect those still alive and bring amongst them the people and supplies they need to be physically secure and spiritually fed and today we pray especially for brian mcconochie and ratnak may the work of this ministry bring justice peace and the saving truth of christ to the nation of cambodia lord in your mercy heavenly father we now turn our prayers to your church on earth we thank you that in the gift of your son you have brought us all together jew and gentile and even to the ends of the earth you have given us adoption into your holy family create in us the ability to live worthy of the gift we ask for your church around the world that you would fill it with the truth that leads to genuine peace where the church is corrupt purify it where it is wrong correct it and where there is anything amiss reform it but where your church is right strengthen and confirm it where there are right needs in the church supply those needs and most importantly where it is divided and torn apart make it whole again lord in your mercy we pray especially for our anglican communion as our leaders are faced with major decisions at both gafcon and lambeth over the next two months we ask that you give us grace to understand the great dangers we are in in a seriously divided church

take away all rancor and malice and whatever else may hinder us from truly seeking your goodwill for your church we pray that we will become a church of one heart and soul united in one holy bond of truth faith and charity and may with one undivided mind and one mouth glorify you and serve you on earth lord in your mercy lord in your mercy we pray for all practical matters pertaining to these events we lift up before you all those who will travel meet debate and pray together keep them in safety and in peace we pray especially for our saint john's leadership build them up in health and all spiritual gifts so they may have the energy and wisdom and desire to know your will and do your work lord in your mercy we pray now for our fellow anglicans who through our turmoil are perhaps feeling orphaned this morning for the churches in niagara and vancouver island who are unable to be in their own buildings this morning we pray for a unity of spirit and a sense of peace we pray too for your hand in the settlement of all legal disputes which arise give your wisdom to all those who are in positions of authority and discerning the best way forward in these times keeping foremost in all minds the advancement of your gospel so the world may know your truth lord in your mercy finally we pray for those amongst us who are grieving sick sad hurt and in need in any way we pray your strength and comfort for them and remember to you now rowena fiona chris deborah janet mayran and edith heavenly father you sent your son to teach and to comfort and to save raise up faithful leaders in your church that they may teach and comfort so that your whole church might be one and your love known to every corner of the earth we ask this all in the name of your dear son jesus christ amen