

Ephesians 2:11-22 AM

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Preacher: Canon David Short

- [0 : 0 0] Our Heavenly Father, now we pray that you would strengthen us inwardly and give us something of the comprehension of the height and length and breadth and depth of the love of Jesus Christ, which goes beyond all knowing so that we might be filled with the fullness of God.
- And we ask this in his name. Amen. Please be seated. And as you turn back to Ephesians chapter 2 on page 976 and 977, can I say a special word of welcome to Addie Roberts, who read our first lesson for us, who came further than all of you this morning to come to church.
- She came from the bottom of Australia, from Adelaide. It's great to have you. And I couldn't recognize any change in her accent when she read the Bible. Last week, Ewan and Cindy Wilding traveled all the way from the bottom of Australia to be with us.
- And the week before that, it was Ed and Anita Bowes. Anyone else I've missed? There seems to be a bit of an exodus and then a return.
- So it's great to have you back. Now we're in a series moving up to Easter. And each week we... It ought to be a ravishing series because we're looking at the cross.
- [1 : 3 2] And we understand more and more of the treasure that we have in Jesus Christ dying on the cross. Not just forgiveness of sins. But something of the revelation of the glory of God and the love of Christ.
- And today the theme is in the cross of Jesus we have reconciliation and peace with God and with each other.
- And I think we would be hard pressed to think of anything more practical and important and needed and urgent today.
- From the Middle East to the Sudan, from Asia to Europe, our world is deeply troubled.
- And there's appalling violence and bloodshed and suffering. I checked this week. In the civil war in Sudan, 150,000 people are estimated to have been killed.
- [2 : 3 6] In Russia's war on Ukraine, 200,000 have been killed. And each week here we pray for peace. And we believe that God is all good and God is all powerful.
- And yet things seem to get worse. And every single one of us knows the pain of ruptured relationships. Many of them we've caused ourselves.
- We're a mystery to ourselves. And others are just baffling. And what is God's response to the evil in the world? We know he hates violence and hostility and ruptured relationships.
- We know he is more pained about this than we are. We get some measure of the importance of relationships and reconciliation to God in this passage by the fact that he is willing to pay the ultimate cost of the life of his son.
- And what God does in the face of evil, what he offers us in the face of evil, are not philosophical answers, but himself on a cross.

[3 : 45] That's what he gives to us. The cross of Jesus Christ. That is the place which is completely outrageous to the world. Because it was the brutal murder of an innocent man in a faraway place.

And we say this is the source of reconciliation and peace. Yes, says the Apostle Paul in this passage. Ephesians 2, 11 to 22.

It neatly divides. It falls out into three. And Paul tells us the need for reconciliation and peace. The source of reconciliation and peace. And the fruit of reconciliation and peace.

So firstly then, the first two verses, 11 and 12. The need for reconciliation. Now, we are a complete mystery to ourselves as human beings, aren't we?

You know, we are capable of great kindness, heartbreaking kindness and cruelty. Blaise Pascal, a couple of centuries ago, said this.

[4 : 52] We're capable of the deepest friendships and murderous hostility. We're the pinnacle of creation and its greatest danger. We are the glory and refuse of the universe, which is a polite translation of glory and garbage of the universe.

We bear the image of God, but it's ruptured. We've replaced intimacy with God with fear and flight and death. We've exchanged the worship of God for the worship of ourselves.

And every, every ruptured relationship is a result of sin. Sin. Because sin is a spiritual and relational problem. Yes, it's directed at God.

Yes, sin directed at God has affected every molecule of my spiritual DNA. And the sin is why I sabotage my relationships.

I keep creating hostility. And the reason is this. If I play God, if I'm trying to play God in my life, you're not. You're there to serve me, thank you very much.

[5 : 59] And I'm there to manipulate you to my ends, but to do it in the most polite Canadian way I can. It's not a superficial surface problem.

Can't be fixed by better laws or better intentions or moral commitments or even the best therapy. My sin creates strife and hostility.

My sin spoils every relationship that I am in, starting with God, and I'm powerless to make reconciliation. And the classic example in the Apostle Paul's day in verses 11 and 12 was the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile.

But of course, the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile is not the only, it's not confined to those two. You find it in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants and left and right in North America.

And we spend vast amounts of money and time seeking peace, but we are unable to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. And the Apostle Paul in verse 11 and 12 speak about two ruptures, one with God, one vertical, and one horizontal with each other.

[7 : 19] And the horizontal rupture is owing to the vertical rupture with God. He writes to a primarily Gentile church and he says in verse 11, you used to be called, quote, the uncircumcision by those who call themselves, quote, the circumcision.

And you don't need much imagination to read that verse to hear the contempt the Jews had for Gentiles and Gentiles had for Jews. You uncircumcised.

And they had exaggerated this mark of the covenant of the Jews as a badge of honour and a way of scorning those who are not Jewish. And Paul says it's nothing to be particularly proud of.

I mean, it's just made with human hands. And the reason God had chosen Israel in the first place was to be a showcase of what it was like to live at peace with God.

They were meant to be a pipeline of blessing to the world of his peace. But they had taken God's gifts and they began, they turned them around and it weaponised them for their own arrogance. Forgetting that at the heart of their life together was the sacrificial system.

[8 : 34] Because God dealt with our sin, God dealt with their sin by sacrifice. And since peace with God and with each other can only come by atonement, it was nothing to be particularly proud of.

And what lay underneath their hostility towards Gentiles and the Gentiles' hostility towards them, verse 12, is you were separated from Christ.

He begins that verse, having no hope and without God in the world. Now, every one of us has heartfelt fractures in our lives.

Deeply personal ruptures that we seem unable to resolve and solve. And you can be brilliant and beautiful and successful. But without Christ, if we're without Christ and without the cross, we are without hope.

Because the cause of these ruptures is in the end our rebellion against God. All human divisions and ruptures come from the fact that we've separated ourselves from God. And our deepest need is first to be reconciled with him who alone has the power to remake us.

[9 : 44] So that is the need for reconciliation, very briefly. So where does it come from? Number two, the source. And if you look down at the passage, verses 13 to 18 begin, But now, something has happened that has created a different objective reality.

Where hatred and hostility have been replaced with intimacy and love. But now, verse 13, in Christ Jesus, you who are far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

We didn't draw near out of our great virtue and strength. We were far off, hostile to God. God took the initiative. It's God who's brought us near.

And the way he's done it is at the cost of his son, his death, by the blood of the death on the cross. This is the source of reconciliation with God. God has changed the state.

He's brought us from being enemies into friends. And it is astonishing when you think about it. I mean, God was the offended party. We are the cause of the hostility.

[11 : 00] But he steps into the breach, takes the hostility to himself, overcomes the alienation and distance. And what takes place on the cross happens before we even knew about it, independently of whether we even wanted it.

So, in all true reconciliation, this is how it works. God does not paper over the cracks. He doesn't pretend that the cause for the rupture never occurred.

What he does is he faces it and takes it to himself and he resolves it. He deals with the cause of the rupture. And only then can there be true reconciliation.

God hates fake peace. He hates it when we're playing politely but really inside. We're not dealing with anything and we despise the people we deal with.

No wonder in verse 14 Paul says, He himself is our peace. Who has made us both one and broken down in his flesh, that's the cross again, the dividing wall of hostility.

[12 : 08] Because the peace of God is full restoration. And Jesus is the personification of our peace. Because in his death, God does not take revenge on us.

He doesn't treat us as we treated him. He doesn't treat us as we deserve. He treats us as we didn't deserve. He doesn't hold our wrongs against us. He cancels the debt and frees us so that we can be reconciled.

And that is peace. This is a huge Bible word piece. It's the Old Testament word, shalom. And it's more than just the end of hostility. And it's more than just a psychological state of mind.

Shalom means this. And I quote from Nicholas Volterstorff. It's to enjoy living before God. To enjoy living in my physical surroundings.

To enjoy living with one's fellows. And to enjoy life with one's self. And the one thing that punctures shalom peace is sin.

[13 : 12] Christ is our peace because on the cross he has made us both one. He didn't take Gentiles and unite them to Israel. Which he does say in Romans.

But out of two separate groups. God creates a new humanity. Look at verse 15.

That he might create. That's the Bible word. In himself one new man. Literally one new humanity. In the place of two.

So making peace. Might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross. Thereby killing the hostility. What God does through Jesus' death on the cross.

Is a greater miracle than the original creation of the world. There's more power involved. Because when God created the world. There was no hostility. But now there is opposition.

[14 : 15] And by a mighty and sovereign action. Act through God. Through Jesus on the cross. As Jesus takes the hostility in himself. God overcomes the rupture and the alienation.

And he creates a new humanity. A third human race. Out of the hundreds and hundreds of different tribes. A race that is created new.

New creations. Who will display the presence and power and purpose of God. To a fractured world. That's the aim. God took Jew and Gentile.

Made one human race. And the new race. If you're a believer. This is you. It's not meant to be marked by hostility and rupture. Or pride or contempt of others.

But by reconciliation and peace. And serving and growing in love. With one another. It's why when you become a Christian. Your conscience changes.

[15 : 17] You find a desire for fellowship. With other Christians. And a growing humility. With other believers. And when another believer sins against you. And they do. And they will.

You go to them one on one. And you tell them. The truth. Of what's happened. Humbly and prayerfully. Maybe you've sinned against them as well.

The prayer is that God would give them the humility. To see it and repent. And when they do. You say words of forgiveness to them. And so make reconciliation. What if they don't repent?

Well it depends on what they've done. If it's serious enough. You might take two or three others with you the next time. But if they don't repent then again.

And it depends how serious it is. You may need to hand them over to the Lord. There's great realism in the Bible about all this. In the book of Romans.

[16 : 16] Paul says. If possible. So far as it depends on you. Live peaceably. Live at peace with all. In other words.

It's clear that. It's not always possible to be at peace with everyone. There are people. Who will not allow you to make peace with them. And sometimes.

This does not depend on you. You can forgive. And you can bless. And you can give all the cold water in the world. But you can't take responsibility. For creating peace between you.

What we can take responsibility for. Is being peacemakers. As Jesus said. Blessed are the peacemakers. This is part of our response to the gospel.

And Paul pulls on this response. In verse 17. And says. Jesus came and preached peace. To all of you. Who are far off. And peace to those who are near.

[17 : 13] For through him. We both have access to the father. By the spirit. Jesus preached peace. To both Jew and Gentile. We're not reconciled to each other.

Or to God. Automatically. Or against our will. We hear the gospel of God's love. And the action in the death of Jesus. How our sins have created. A rupture between us and God.

And we believe. That he is able to make us new. And forgive us. And so we turn from our sins to him. And he reconciles us to himself. And gives us access to God.

By his Holy Spirit. Well then thirdly. What's the fruit of reconciliation? What does shalom peace look like? Now in action. And we look at the last couple of verses.

And the emphasis here. Is on privilege and purpose. And it's amazing. Paul says. We are being built together. Into a holy temple. Where God himself dwells.

[18 : 11] This is where God will show himself. To the world. And you see in verse 20. The holy temple has a foundation. And the foundation is the apostles and prophets.

They are the ones who received the revelation from God. And they brought the gospel into the world. And the church is based on their teaching. That's why the epistles are so important.

Have you ever thought about the fact that the Bible. Has an old testament. Which points forward to the person of the Lord Jesus. Filling our imagination of his coming. And then the gospels.

Reveal to us the glory of the Lord Jesus. And the epistles. Is the Holy Spirit through the apostles and prophets. Explaining more of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's all about Jesus Christ. Christ. So we have to constantly bring each other back. To the teaching of the epistles. They are the foundation of the Holy Temple. That God is building.

[19 : 09] And what holds the building together. Is the cornerstone. Who is Jesus Christ himself. So the work of Jesus now. Is to grow a temple amongst us.

To grow a people. Who love unity. Who love reconciliation. Who are willing to repent and submit to each other. Who come from vastly different backgrounds.

I mean look at the raw material he has to work with. It's easier for me. I'm looking at you all. We're so different. But this is not idealism or utopianism.

When a group of believers determine. We're going to focus on Jesus Christ. God gives us a unity. That's just supernatural. And the growth then comes from him.

In his temple. This is not just something for heaven. For the future. This is the present reality of the church. The more we build on the foundation. Of the apostles and prophets.

[20 : 10] The more we are connected to Jesus Christ. The more we're fitted together. God dwells amongst us. That's what it's saying here. See verse 21.

In whom the whole structure being joined together. That's the emphasis. Grows. Into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you are also being built together. Into a dwelling place for God by the spirit. It's hard to see it sometimes. Isn't it? I love the fact that this word grows is there.

It means we're not perfect. But we're growing. I mean every church has on the entrance doorway. We're under spiritual construction. Or reconstruction. God hasn't finished with us yet. Be patient with us.

God is doing the building. And one of the biggest challenges. As I said before. Is the raw materials he's working with. But the way we grow is this. It is as we are fitted together.

[21 : 08] Think about that. Growth does not come individualistically. It comes as we relate to each other. As we're fitted and joined together.

Or as Paul says in the rest of Ephesians. It's as we seek to maintain the unity in the bond of peace. It's as we seek to build each other up.

In the body of Christ. It's as we speak words. That give grace to those who hear. It's as we put away anger and malice.

And try to serve each other. Always going back to the cross of Christ. Seeing ourselves. And seeing others. And seeing our world through the cross. And I think part of the spiritual increase in the church.

Is having our edges knocked off. So that we fit better with Christ. And better with one another. I know that's happened for me over the years. And as we do.

[22 : 06] We become a dwelling place for God. And his presence. It's fantastic isn't it. But what makes the church attractive? It's not how clever you are.

It's not our architecture. Or our distinguishing brilliant coffee. It's a sense of the presence of God. That's it. And that's what we should pray for.

Amen.