

Reconciled By the Blood of Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Ephesians chapter 2 verse 13 page 1175 Ephesians 2 verse 13 but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ for he himself is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two so making peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross thereby killing the hostility

Paul is now doing once again what he has been doing all throughout this letter he's going back to the beginning he's looking at the same gospel and again from a different perspective rather like when you look at a mountain I don't know if you've ever seen the great mountains of Europe I suppose you could do this with Ben Nevis but it's more effective if you go to one of the great mountains like Mont Blanc or the Eiger in Switzerland and you can see these mountains from different perspectives depending on which road you travel on and the mountain is glorious whatever way you look at it but it has a particular glory in one direction and another glory in another direction and if you go round to the other side you see it in another glory well this is what Paul is doing he's like traveling around the mountain and he's looking and he's describing this great gospel the gospel that's had such the single most profound effect on the life of this man he was never literally never the same again since the day he discovered the gospel in Jesus Christ and now in this letter he's been unfolding that gospel to us you see we're entirely wrong when we water down the gospel to one or two catchphrases the gospel is a whole world of discovery and we'll spend the rest of eternity discovering more and more of what God did for us in the Lord Jesus Christ we're only at the beginning Paul is only at the beginning he's only scratching the surface and we've seen already how he begins the letter by describing it in terms of way before the world was even created how God chose us in him and we went through that then he's describing it in the word redemption verse 7 then he's describing it in the word inheritance we have an inheritance and he unfolds that by way of explaining how we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit and so on and when he comes on to chapter 2 he comes on to another perspective he's looking at the gospel again he's now going around the mountain and he's looking at it from yet another perspective and he's talking about the personal lives of the people to whom he's writing the Ephesians and he's saying let's go back in time to what before you were converted and he describes that you were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world the prince of the power of the air the spirit that's now at work in the sons of disobedience you thought you were having such a great life you thought you were free and easy and unaccountable to anybody but that's actually the reality of what your life was like until God but God verse 4 being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ and in this perspective he's taking the the resurrection of Jesus Christ and he is talking about how our new life in Christ relates to Jesus resurrected life we saw that last time now he's doing the same thing again and this time he's the word is the operative word is reconciliation he's talked about redemption he's talked about inheritance he's talked about life he's talked about election and now he's talking about reconciliation through specifically and only through the blood of Jesus Christ so this time he's not talking about the resurrection of Jesus essential though that is he's now going back before the resurrection to Calvary and he's talking about

how essential and how key the blood of Jesus Christ is in reconciling us first of all to God and in reconciling us to one another in other words he's saying the blood of Jesus Christ does two things and when of course he talks about the blood of Christ he's not talking about the actual physical blood that was shed he's talking about the life the death of Jesus Christ the life which Jesus laid down on the cross as he became sin for us the Bible says and through that sacrifice and through his death we have been brought near to God so that's the first thing that the blood of Jesus Christ does for us it brings us near to God that's what he says here we have been brought near by the blood of Jesus near what near God we've been reconciled to God you see when you really think about it the kind of tensions and wars and hatreds and discords in this world wherever you find them and whatever form they take whether it's an argument between a husband and his wife or whether it's the great wall that exists between

Israel and Palestine and all the lives that are lost in the wars that take place now and that have taken place through the centuries this is a world full of hostility and whatever form that hostility takes it's rooted in the fact that we are a fallen human race and because the relationship which God created us to have with him has been broken by sin the relationship which we ought to have with other people and which would otherwise have continued if God if Adam hadn't sinned in a perfect state that has been broken the reason why there is hatred and discord and why there is such tension in the world today and why there is such separation and bitterness in the world is because humankind has the has become separated from God and as a consequence of that we have been separated from one another but look at what the apostle tells us here it tells us that the blood of Christ it reverses that separation between us and God it brings us back to that relationship which God intended us to have in the first place a relationship of nearness but look at what it does as a consequence of that it brings us to one another it reconciles people to one another that's the two things we have been brought near by the blood of Christ verse 14 for he himself is our peace who has made us both one and broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two so making peace and might reconcile us both to God and what this is telling us is that whatever peace processes there might be in this world and of course we support them as long as it's on the basis of of of rightness and justice then of course we support any attempt that is made that will avoid and prevent bloodshed in time to come but it's only a scratching of the surface isn't it it's only a token effort there'll never be peace in this world until people come to grips with the real root of the problem the root of the problem of course is a relationship with God and it is only as a person comes to be right with God by believing in Jesus Christ that he now can go ahead and he can treat and respect his fellow man or woman with that compassion and that love and that wants to really reckon be reconciled to God the gospel it works in bringing now I know what you're going to say that there have been times in history when when that we haven't lived up to this chapter and I would be the first to confess that there are times in history when you can point the finger and you can say well look at this time look at the crusades for example I mean everybody points to the crusades there's a great excuse not to believe the gospel what about the crusades we're told the crusades wasn't Jesus they were people's that that was a particular time in history when people were utterly deluded and just because you're a Christian doesn't mean you're immune from delusion and immune from fanaticism that's why we all have to watch and we all have to root our lives and our lifestyles in the bible the bible must direct everything and some of you will say well you know what are you talking about the church of england is about to split because of homosexuality and all the other splits that we've seen in the church throughout the centuries and how can you then talk tonight about reconciliation you can't even be reconciled to each other can't even get on with each other let alone and talk about solving all the world's problems once again once again we are sinful human beings and i'm not here tonight to defend the actions of the church or the history of the church i am the first to admit that the church is anything but what it should be

but it's no use in starting from what the church is we have to start with what the church should be and that's what the apostle gets excited about in this passage and if we tonight honestly with an open mind go back to the bible and if we can if we can if we can recognize the greatness of the church not the problems of the church but if we start with what the church is we'll see that in a few moments time then hopefully we can work our way towards applying these principles in the way in which we relate to one another so that we can be the an example of the kind of church that the lord jesus uh a bought with his uh blood and a week so we can be a living example of how the church should be in terms of our uh in terms of our um example and our lifestyle now as i said the blood of jesus christ and we're talking about calvary the death of jesus at calvary it brings us near to god and it brings us near one another these are the two things i'd like us to think about this evening but look at how the blood of jesus brings us near to god and brings us near to one another look at what he says in verse 15 this is how this is the means by which the blood of jesus christ brings us back to god by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances so that he that's jesus might create in himself one new man in place of the two so making peace did you notice as we read that did you ask the kind of questions that i think we should be asking when you're reading a passage like this because this passage is always meant to evoke questions in our in our mind by a look at how he did look let me read it again by abolishing the law the law of commandments and ordinances this is how jesus created peace and this is how the blood of jesus creates peace between ourselves and god and between ourselves and one another what does he mean then when he says that the blood of jesus does this by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances well in order to try and explain that you have to go all the way back to the old testament and to the period of time when the children of israel were led by mooses out of egypt into the wilderness and the first thing that happened is that they were stopped at the base of mount zionai and mooses went up mount zionai where he spent 40 days in god's presence and for a particular reason so that god would give him what is known as the law god's law you see the law by which the children of israel lived wasn't a law in which they made up themselves it didn't arise as a result of a democratic process it was given to them directly by god himself and it is divided into two sections there is the moral law and this is what he talks about paul talks about the law of commandments verse 15 the law of commandments that we know as the ten commandments because that's how it's summed up the law of commandments but there's also there was also the ceremonial law or the law of ordinances verse 15 again the law of commandments and ordinances there were the two aspects to god's law for his people israel both of these aspects were all contained in the one set of instructions which mooses brought or which god sent to israel through mooses there was the moral law on how they were to live morally of course we know them we shall not have any other gods before me you shall not make unto you a graven image or likeness of anything that's in heaven and earth or the earth beneath or the or the waters under the earth you must not take the name of the lord and god in vain remember the sabbath day to keep it holy

[14 : 23] honor your father and your mother you shall not kill you shall not commit and so on the ten commandments the ten commandments and by the way the laws that we benefit from in the west they are founded on the ten commandments whatever values that we are so proud of in the in the west we should always remember that they are actually grounded and rooted in the ten commandments and yet we're so good at slagging off the bible in our so-called modern world which thinks that we've progressed and advanced to the states where we can do away with and dispense with the bible all together well if we do that we'll be the poorer our society will be less civilized civilization depends on the values that we derive from the bible and from the ten commandments but i'm not going to go into that this evening that there isn't time that was the moral law and of course much of the moral law you can read about in the application of for example health and safety if you read the book of libiticus you'll find one health and safety regulation after another you'll find cleanliness regulations you'll find laws about how to relate to one another making sure that you create a system of justice with one another see god god gave them these laws for their good so that they could exist together and so that they wouldn't fall out with one another and kill each other and war against each other and and so that there would be a freedom a balance between responsibility and freedom amongst his people now that's what god's law was all about but coupled with that there was a a complicated system of sacrifices and that's what we call the ceremonial law or the ordinances in verse 15 the ordinances in which that every day the people were able to approach god but there was only one way in which they were able to approach god personally and that was through the system of sacrifice you absolutely had to sacrifice and that was of course it always involved the death of an animal it could be a bull or it could be a goat or it could be a lamb or it could be a sheep it had to be an animal without blemish and the priest had to kill it and they bring his blood to god that was how the people of god were reconciled to god because god said without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness so the one aspect of the law declared what god demanded and how god demanded his people should live the other aspect of the law declared how when they went wrong they were able to be reconciled to god through the shedding of blood i remember talking to somebody many years ago about sacrifice in the old testament and we're talking about the gospel talking about the bible and when we came to the idea of sacrifice he stopped me and he said you know he says this is all very distasteful and i guess that sums up the way many people perhaps even most people think of the bible it is so distasteful isn't it after all what kind of god would require animals being put to death and sacrificed and all of this the shedding of blood why is that necessary anyway surely why is it necessary well there's a simple answer to that and that's because god says it's necessary you see the problem is that we always start with where we are don't we we always start by saying why is that necessary anyway in other words i.e i don't think it's necessary so therefore god should adjust his demands to suit me and if i don't think it's necessary and if i think

it's a bit silly and distasteful then god should do likewise that's always the way we are isn't it it's always the way we have been since the beginning of time that's what the devil said to eve as god really said it's a bit silly isn't it it's only a piece of fruit after all he knows that as soon as you touch that piece of fruit you will your eyes will be open and you'll be like god you see it's always been the same because we start from where we are and we think that god should shape himself and fashion himself according to the way we think the shedding of blood is necessary because god says is necessary and if you really want to be reconciled to god tonight there is only one way in which that can happen and that is by the shedding of blood there are other laws of the universe that you could equally complain about and you could equally look down on like the law of gravity for example the law of gravity is what keeps us our feet on the ground i don't hear anybody saying oh well this is this is ridiculous why does god why does god force us to stay on the ground you know you could equally say that can you but i don't hear anybody saying that because it's just so obvious that well that's just something you have to live with it's something that we've lived with from the time that we were babies something you don't even think about but when you think about it you know you could equally complain about that god why do you why can't we fly why is it that we're rooted in the good because that's what god says that's the way we've been created that's the system and the universe that we belong to and we have to obey the law one of those laws the law or rather the principle by which we are reconciled to god is the shedding of blood and that's it the wages of sin is death the penalty of sin is death and that's where now then i'm getting sidetracked here let's come back on to the to the law of commandments and ordinances how then how then did jesus in his death abolish the law of commandments and ordinances how did he abolish them and does that mean that they have nothing more to say to her does that mean that i don't need to bother with the ten commandments any longer and i don't need to bother reading my old testament any longer does that mean that i don't need to what bother because christ has done away with it does that mean that i don't need to worry about honoring my father and mother and not committing adultery and not taking the name of the lord in vain or the lord's day or any of these things is that what's that what we're saying that he abolished the law of commandments and if not what what does it mean that jesus abolished those commandments and ordinances well let me explain it by saying this alongside the ten commandments came the demand that the every one of these ten commandments must be kept remember we're talking about law here we're not talking about guidelines we're not talking about just instructions we're talking about what god demands of people it's a requirement it's not that god is saying to people well this is how well i would like you to live he's saying this is how you must live as you live before me and you're accountable before me and what's more i require absolute utter perfection so that means that if you break the law in one aspect you've broke the whole thing you're guilty of breaking the whole of my law if you've broken just even one now that puts a different a different spin on it altogether doesn't it it's in a different light the law comes with demands in which god demands that this must be our life and of course it was because his people israel couldn't live up to these demands that god provided for them in the ordinances

and in the sacrifices by which they were able to worship god and by which they knew that their sins had been forgiven so one balanced the other the law the ten commandments demanded how they must live but also the sacrifices now when jesus came into the world and when he laid down his life on the cross final demand you can't just abolish a bill you can't destroy it you can destroy the piece of paper but the account is still there and the demand is still there and there's nothing you can do until that bill is paid when you pay it you can then take that bill and you can throw it in the bank so someone's saying this is how can i abolish the law it's not that he says well you don't have to listen to god anymore he's saying that all that god has demanded from you i have paid in my death in a calvin that is how he abolished the law well in that case there's a further question that's the if i'm following jesus do i have to do i have to live well of course it's not a question of having to live it's a question of wanting to live as god wants you to live you see when a person becomes a christian the whole relationship that that person has with the bible changes so it no longer is there this great weight and this great burden and pressure on the person in which but he hates every moment of it yeah that's the problem because what happens is that we know what's right and we hate doing what's wrong because we don't want to do what's right we don't want to live as god wants us to live and that's where the root problem is isn't it that's where sin operates in our will and in our desire and it really operates in the fact that we just we want to do our own thing we want to live our own life but when a person begins to follow jesus when he discovers the grace of god in the gospel the whole relationship with god's demand changes and we love we love the lord that's what david said your law is like honey it's like gold i love it i love it oh i know i don't keep it as i should i know there are many many faults in my life i trip and i fall and i fail so many times and yet i can come back knowing that the lord loves me and that the lord will accept me and that i can come back with a new enthusiasm and then and a determination to obey now what in the world makes a person want to obey the lord a new life and a new heart a new beginning a converted life and that's what these ephesians were were had experience they were now converted they were now brought near to god and christ had he had them uh brought them near to god by divide by abolishing the law of commandments near the ordinances they were abolished in that once christ's sacrifice had taken place there was no further need for animals to be sacrificed because all of these animals they looked forward sacrificing the old testament they looked ahead to the coming of jesus but when he came and when he laid his own precious blood and when he shed his precious blood for us then uh he uh he there was no need for them anymore we can be brought near but they can be brought near to god but lastly christ's sacrifice tonight brings us not only near to god not only records reconciles us to god and takes away the separation and the barrier that stands tonight or that stood tonight between god and us not only is the door open for people like ourselves to enter into that door by faith in jesus and to know god for ourselves to be reconciled to him but we are also brought to one another

there were deep divisions in paul's faith just as there are today we're very conscious of the separation from the discrimination that exists in our in our day and i guess we live in a world where that kind of separation is discouraged on ethnic grounds or on any other grounds we see it but that kind of separation and that hostility that there was between one group of individuals and another it didn't begin with nazi germany and it didn't begin with apartheid in south africa it goes all the way back as i said before to where the world went so badly wrong at the beginning but it was an existence in the apostles day in a religious thing not just an ethnic sense but a religious thing and if you wanted to see the example how this was worked out all you had to do is go to jerusalem in paul's day and look at the temple the temple was the temple was a magnificent building the jewish temple it was built by herod just before christ was born and a but this was how it was built and this is what paul was talking about when he talked about the separation that existed it was built on an elevated plane on an elevated platform and around it was what they called the court of the priest so only the priests could enter into that court and then to the east of that was the court of israel first of all only for men israelites male israelites and then later on beyond that was the court of women all of these courts they were placed on the same level this elevated level but in order to go further than that you had to go down steps and eventually you came to a wall platform and then you went down another set of steps and you came to a wall it was about 1.5 meters high and outside of that wall was what they called the court of the gentiles now the gentiles were anyone who wasn't a jew so if you weren't an israelite you were a gentile as temple as that and this wall all the way around the base of the temple it surrounded the temple and every so often at an equal distance along this wall there was a notice just like the kind of notice that you see in many places keep out normally of course you keep out because it's dangerous to go in or because you're not authorized to go in or whatever but this one was only it only forbade the gentiles for entering in in other words if you weren't a jew you could not cross this wall and just in case you were ever tempted to do so the notice also said trespassers will be executed and they really meant it they really meant it now i could spend a lot of time this evening going into why the separation existed all began and when god called abraham to be his special people when he marked them out as his own people this special mark on their bodies called circumcision that we read about here in in verse 11 the people of israel were called out way beyond way back in time but they were never ever to use that mark or to regard that separation as somehow somehow a mark of their own greatness and their own pride but that's what it became and they lost sight of the fact that it was by god's grace that they were in existence in the first place and what they did was they kind of separated they thought they were better than other people they thought they were closer to god and more deserving of god because of who they had come from because they were children of abraham and instead of humbling the people of israel it created a kind of pride within

them and of course it came to a head when jesus came in into the world and they refused to recognize jesus as the messiah as the messiah and of course if you're proud in in your relations to god you're going to be proud in your relations to other people and that was the exist that was what was happening at that time but now says paul that separation is no more in the gospel there is no longer any condemnation condemnation to those who are in jesus christ and there is no hostility between one religious group and another just as it's true says paul that the jewish people were privileged in that they did belong to god but when jesus came into the world and when the gospel was preached it was preached first of all to the jewish people but then beyond the jewish people so that others who weren't jews had the opportunity of coming to faith in jesus themselves and that's what was happening here in chapter 2 those of you who were afar off have been brought near by the blood of jesus you were separated you were alienated look at verse 12 you were strangers you had no hope you had no god in the world i wonder how many of us here tonight you look back at your own life and that describes it doesn't it separated from god alienated from god stranger to god having no hope if you don't have christ you have no hope but now and here's this other word but coming again just as he said before but god being great rich and mercy because of the great love with which he loved us here he's using it again but now whatever you were in the past but now god has transformed you by bringing you to himself and washing your sins away and opening your eyes to see the simplicity of what it means to believe in jesus christ and him alone but now you who were one time far away from god far away the got from the gospel you have been brought near by the blood of christ let me ask you one question before i close what does the blood of christ mean to you this evening it's a question i make a point of asking everyone who comes to the lord's table for the first time i don't want to know whether you know your 16th catechism be good if you did be good if all of us did but that's not what qualifies a person to sit at the lord's table what we need to know is this what does jesus mean to you what does his death mean to you because that's what we'll do god willing next lord's day we'll sit at the table and we will drink the symbol of his shed blood and it's the symbol that it's that blood that brings us together as one body of believers all of us different different ages different intellects different backgrounds all of us different personalities and yet we're brought to one place with us in that special unique relationship that god calls communion first of all communion with god then communion with other people

[34 : 46] in which we come together as one but brought together by the blood of jesus christ and so tonight if you can read these verses with me i remember being a stranger to god separated from him without god and without hope in my life but now i've been brought near by the blood and tonight i depend and rest only on that blood for my salvation then if you can say that then take your place along with the lord's people as we remember his death that cleanses us from all sin may the lord bless his word to us let's pray our father in heaven we give thanks for one more opportunity of hearing and reflecting on your word we ask lord once again tonight that you will enrich our hearts may that word dwell in us may it not just pass us by but may it dwell within us and take hold and take root in us and change us once and for all in jesus name amen