8-26-18

Ephesians 2:13-16

But now in Christ Jesus; Paul has just finished detailing the hopeless plight of the Gentile people and now the incarnate Christ steps into history. We as Christians, often wonder at how anyone could not believe in what the Bible says or in Jesus as Saviour. The real wonder, however, is that *anyone* is a Christian. The desires of the flesh, the pull of the world, and the schemes of the devil are overwhelming. Our very nature separates us from God and makes us objects of His wrath. The fact that Christians exist is an indisputable testimony to the power of God; to the power of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

God has sovereignly chosen the nation of Israel to be His people. He gave to them all the laws and made all the covenants with them. He sent prophets to them to try to get them on the right track when they strayed. God showered them with mercy and also judgement when needed to bring them back to Him. All to develop in them a faith in God, a faith that would work to their salvation. The Gentiles had none of these, other than the common grace that God provides for all that we may live.

We, as Gentiles, were far from God with no hope of coming to Him; We were spiritually and relationally far away, both from God and His people. But now in Christ Jesus: all of us who were far away, and with no way to come close, have been brought near. Notice those words, “have been brought”: this is nothing we have accomplished ourselves. We had no way of coming back to life spiritually; we had no way of restoring fellowship with God. In fact, we didn’t want to. We were at enmity with God. In this impossible situation, God revealed His power through Jesus Christ by making a way for our spiritual resurrection and return to fellowship with Him.

But see the high cost of bringing us into fellowship with God and with His chosen people: the blood of Christ. Not only do we need to stand in awe of God’s power, but we need to have humility and gratefulness in the presence of such mercy and grace. Endeavor to keep in mind what has been done for you; pray for the Holy Spirit to put into your heart a sense of what price has been paid on your behalf. By these things, thanksgiving will dwell in your heart and God will be glorified.

Being brought near gives the idea of “getting along”; in other words, “peace”. The peace Paul speaks of here is the peace that can only be brought about through Jesus. He actually claims that Jesus Himself is our peace. Peace is one of those ideas that is used a lot in our world, usually in the context of avoiding or stopping war. A lot of energy has been expended in the pursuit of peace; there have been lots of conversations, lots of speeches, lots of agreements and treaties. The idea of peace in the world is a noble one, yet it remains elusive.

Christians can get caught up in trying to explain the way to peace. Just do what it says in the Bible: treat people nice, don’t steal, don’t get angry, don’t covet or be envious. We get told to mind our own business. If human-beings were capable of bringing about world peace, it should have happened by now. Consider the knowledge we have, the technology, all the smart people in the world. We have the ability to feed and provide for everyone and have peace; but it’s not there.

The reason for all this is, of course, sin. Mankind’s rebellion against God. We find a very straightforward answer for the lack of peace coming from,

Matthew 22:34-40

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

The efforts at peace in the world tend to focus on people. Attempts at peace tend toward the second commandment. We skip the first and foremost of the commandments; God must come first. But this is the way that a Godless world will try to operate, it is also why the peaceful precepts in the Bible by themselves won’t work. Because of this world’s opposition to God, and specifically, Jesus Christ, mankind will not create any kind of true peace.

Does this mean that the Christian should not pray for world peace? No; but we should be aware of what we are praying for. We can certainly pray for peace in specific situations and, if it is in accordance with God’s will, that prayer can be granted. But in praying for peace in the world, we are first off praying for people to come to Christ. This brings us back to Christ Himself being our peace. Secondly, we are praying for Christ’s Kingdom to come. Peace will only be on the earth while Jesus rules here. During His millennial reign there will be peace because He will rule with a rod of iron. Then, during His eternal reign, there will be peace because sin will be abolished and God will be first to all the citizens of the Kingdom.

Going back to our reading in Ephesians, we see that Paul is referring to a peace that exists now; this is obviously not world peace. It is peace among Christians, it is peace within the church. There was a division between the Jews and the Gentiles and hostility between them was the result. Paul describes that division as a “dividing wall”. Paul probably has two ideas in mind here. The first is the actual wall around the temple in Jerusalem that we talked about last week. It was a wall that separated the court of the Gentiles from the rest of the courts and the temple itself. The wall had signs posted on it insuring that any Gentiles who crossed to the wrong side of the wall would receive the death penalty.

But secondly, there was a much deeper cause of division, a metaphorical wall, the Law. As the chosen people, God had entrusted the Israelites with His Law, and the covenants that went along with keeping them. In addition to God’s law of morality, there was the outward sign of belonging: circumcision. There were the ceremonial laws that provided for atonement and offerings of thanksgiving and peace. In conjunction with these, there were feast days to keep that held special civil significance. All these laws came between the Jews and the Gentiles.

Jesus made peace between these two groups by removing the dividing walls. The physical wall in the temple remained, but as Christians, the Jews and Gentiles could worship Yahweh side by side. Also, look at what Paul said about breaking down the dividing wall in verse 15, “by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances”. Here he is saying that the Law was the source of enmity between the two groups. Christ abolished that enmity. Jesus fulfilled the Law. By His work on the cross, the sacrifices, feasts, and symbols were no longer of any value. More importantly, He did away with the condemnation of the moral Law. The Gentiles who came to believe on Him were free.

As we saw earlier that we who were far away were brought near by the blood of Christ, we see that the enmity caused by the Law was abolished in His flesh. Again, we are face to face with the work of Christ on the cross; with the tremendous sacrifice He made on our behalf. In His death, Jesus destroyed the enmity, He defeated the animosity between Jew and Gentile. Again, how can we but praise our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? How can we offer less that our very lives, to live for Him and to perform His will?

The peace that Jesus provided is within the church. Certainly, Jews and Gentiles are still at war with each other. But as Christians, within the church, there is no longer a division. Why? Because Jesus is He “who made both groups into one”. God is still the creator God, and He still creates through Jesus Christ, just like He did back in the beginning of Genesis. God is still creating. We know from Revelation 21:1 that God will create a new heaven and a new earth. We know from 1 Corinthians 15 that our bodies will be remade when the Lord comes back. We also know from 2 Corinthians 5:17 that when we have accepted Christ, we become a new creature. In our reading today, we see that God has made one new creation out of Jews and Gentiles: Christians.

This whole idea of one new man being created, the Christian, can be broken down even further than with just Jews and Gentiles.

Galatians 3:26-29

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.

While we all keep the physical and social characteristics Paul lists, in Christ, all these things disappear. We become spiritual descendants of Abraham, we all are in line to receive the promises. Because we are all the same in this way, we are Christians, and we put God first, we can have peace. Peace within ourselves, peace within the church.

We do not have to think about this very long to realize that we don’t have perfect peace within ourselves; nor is there always peace within the church. We still suffer fears and anxieties, we still have problems in our lives. Peace does not always exist in the church either. Sometimes things divide us, both in this church and among Christ’s church throughout the world. The problem is not with what Paul is telling us in this passage, the problem is with us; we are still sinners. We, as a new creation in Christ, exist now. But we aren’t perfected yet. That will come later when Jesus comes back.

However, if we are guided by God’s word and led by the Holy Spirit; if it is our desire to be obedient to our Saviour; we can be different from the world. As a church, it must be our focus to put God first; to love Him and to glorify Him. Next is loving each other. It is always easier for people who love each other to work out any problems that come up. Additionally, we must be aware of satan. He will bring outside influences into the church to try to cause dissension.

Jesus means for His church to be a foreshadowing of His Kingdom. He is the head of the church, He will be the King of the world. By Him, peace can be in the church; by Him, peace will be in the earth. What a delightful assignment for us, what a daunting responsibility; to show the world what it will be like when Jesus reigns. Praise God that it is by His strength.

Paul has been talking about Jesus removing the enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles. In so doing, He has created a new humanity forming the church. In verse 16, Paul circles around again to the enmity that involves God. And might reconcile them both in one body to God. “Both” refers to the Jews and the Gentiles and the “one body” refers to the church. Both groups were in trouble as far as God was concerned. The Gentiles had no access to Him at all. The Jews had been given the opportunity but had messed it up completely. Everybody was subject to what Paul talked about back in verse 3, “[we] were by nature children of wrath”.

But Jesus was the reconciliation, Jesus put to death the enmity that was between us and God. And we are reminded again of how this was accomplished: through the cross. God accomplished all this for us through Jesus. All this was at great personal cost to Father and Son. All by grace and mercy and kindness and love from our God. Give Him thanksgiving today; today and every day. He deserves far more than we can give, but isn’t it good to know how much He loves us. What a comfort it is to know that the Almighty God of the universe is for us and not against us.

Prayer

You looked down upon Your creation in love, and saw that we were helpless and hopeless. You allowed Your heart to be drawn to us. Perfectly content in Your Trinity and needing nothing else, You chose to provide a way for us to be in fellowship with You.

Your church is a new creation in mankind. We implore You, that the Holy Spirit guide us. That we never lose focus on Jesus Christ as the head of this body. That we love each other as a Christian family, living peaceably to give You glory.

With Your constant help and guidance, we can be a light to the people. May the light we show always be a reflection of Your light. We desire to be a glimpse of what is to come in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the true King and Lord.

It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray

Amen