

Ephesians
He Himself Is Our Peace (Part 2)
April 27, 2008
Tom Pennington, Pastor
Countryside Bible Church

You don't know how often I thank God for this church. And you know what I mean by "church." I'm not talking about the buildings or grounds. I'm talking about you, the people whom God has brought here, who make up this church. I count it a great privilege to serve alongside of you, and I often thank God for it. There are so many things I appreciate. I love the fact that you love the truth, and that you just can't get enough of it. And I appreciate that because that's how I feel about the truth, and I sense that from you as well. I love your enthusiastic singing. I love your willingness to use your time and gifts to serve other people in the church. I love the spirit of joy and energy and enthusiasm and fellowship that visitors so often comment to me about. In fact, just recently, with the police officers that we've had coming to be here on Sunday, one of them mentioned to me a couple of weeks ago that this was the friendliest church he had ever interacted with, and that he was seriously considering bringing his family here to worship with us. And I hear comments like that often.

As I was thinking this week about this wonderful church, I was also thinking back to how challenging and how difficult it must have been to be a part of those small struggling churches in the first century. Of course, in one sense, there was this excitement. There was an energy as the church was being born, as the Spirit of God was moving in a great way. But it had many challenges as well. That's what the New Testament describes. That's why we have these letters that describe so many struggles and issues. Because the people in those small struggling assemblies were a most unusual assortment of people. Most of them had been strangers, and many of them had been settled enemies and had hated each other their entire lives. And generations of their families had hated generations of the families of the others who were there.

And then, suddenly, with the ministry of the apostle Paul and the reception of the gospel, within days or weeks these different people are brought together and find themselves now together in worship, together in fellowship, together in the most spiritually intimate of situations. It's easy for us with some 2000 years distance to say, well, what's so hard about that? I mean, the truly redeemed of Christ can get along with each other. I think it's really impossible for us to fully appreciate what it was like, how difficult it was.

What happened in the first century church is tantamount to a church today that is made up of left-wing liberals and right wing conservatives. Picture a church with the Kennedys and the Bushes, or a church made up of Jews and Arabs. Picture a church with a redeemed Israeli cabinet and the Saudi royal family. People from both ends of the social extremes. Picture Christian political activists sitting alongside redeemed homosexuals and abortion doctors. Or imagine loyal patriots mixing with recent terrorists, and you have some picture of what the early church was like.

If we were to go back to the book of Acts and examine the initial membership of the church in Ephesus, that's the kind of membership we would see. You remember when we first began this book, we looked back in Acts to see who it was that made up this church. In this church there were many Jews who had come to embrace Jesus as their Messiah from the ministry of Paul for three months in the synagogue there in Ephesus. He also administered, you remember, to those disciples of John the Baptist, committed Jews who had expressed repentance at John's preaching, but had not heard about Christ that He had come. There were also many pagans in the church in Ephesus, Gentiles. Those who were formerly so deeply into the occult that when they burned all of the resources they had accumulated, the value of those resources is estimated to be two hundred and fifty years of a laborer's wages. Many of them had undoubtedly been involved in the worship at the temple of Diana, the temple of Artemis that was there in the city of Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. They had worshipped there with its thousands of priests and priestesses, and its multiple rooms in the temple for religious prostitution.

And these distinct groups had never before interacted, ever. But suddenly, the apostle Paul comes to town, and he shares the gospel, and the Spirit of God works in their hearts, and they recognize Jesus for who He is, and they repent. And they are all connected to Christ, and consequently, they are connected to each other. So, you can understand why ten years after founding this church, Paul is still concerned about helping them fit together. So, in Ephesians 2, Paul reminds them not only of their individual salvation in the first ten verses, but in the second half of chapter 2, he explains to them that Christ's work brought them together with the rest of the people of God regardless of their differences. In fact, I've already told you the theme of this paragraph that begins in verse 11 and runs down through the end of the chapter is this: all Christians, regardless of their backgrounds, are united together with God and with each other in the church through the work of Jesus Christ.

Paul develops that theme in three distinct sections. The first section, verses 11 through 13 describe the reality of the union that exists. And we've looked at that in past weeks. Last week, we just introduced the second section, verses 14 to 18, the reason for the union. The reason for

this connection between us and God, and between us and each other. Let me read this section to you again. Ephesians 2 beginning in verse 14. Paul writes

“For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.”

This section is really the heart and soul of the entire letter. These five verses are all about one very important biblical concept, and that’s the concept of “reconciliation.” The word itself occurs down in verse 16, but the concept of reconciliation permeates every word of this entire paragraph. What creates the need for reconciliation? Who needs to be reconciled? Wherever there is hostility and alienation and enmity there is the need for reconciliation. And all of those things are part of life in a fallen world. There is, because of the fall, alienation and hostility between man and God, and there is also alienation and hostility between men and women.

We need desperately to be reconciled, and the wonderful thing about what Christ has done is that He brings that reconciliation both vertically with God, and horizontally with others. As we saw, verses 11 through 13 describe the reality of that reconciliation, the reality of the union. And verses 14 to 18 describe the reason, the reasons that lie behind the union. What are the reasons? What caused our reconciliation with God and with each other? Well, in verses 14 to 18 Paul offers two basic causes, two basic reasons. The first reason he offers is in verses 14 to 16, the “ministry of Christ,” which we’ll look at together today. The second reason he offers is in verses 17 and 18, the “message of Christ,” which, Lord willing, we’ll look at together next week.

Now, the focus of verses 14 to 16, then, is on the ministry of Christ, what Christ has done. And it’s summarized in the statement that begins verse 14 “for He Himself is our peace.”

That simple statement invites an important question. If He Himself is our peace, then what exactly did Jesus do to gain that peace, or to become that peace, or to procure peace for us? What was the ministry of Christ? And Paul here tells us what His ministry was in three parallel Greek participles. In our English text they’re translated, the middle of verse 14 as “made,” the end of verse 14 “broke down,” and the beginning of verse 15 “abolishing.” These three

participles explain how Christ became our peace, how He has reconciled us to God, and how He's reconciled us to each other. Let's look at them together. The first participle, in the middle of verse 14, "he made both groups into one." Literally, the Greek text says, He has made both things into one thing, He has made both things into one thing. This is the peace Christ made. He made both things, that is groups as the New American Standard has translated it, that's a good idea of what the text means, He made both groups into one group. So, what groups? He's not talking here about all Jews and all Gentiles. Open your paper today, and you will see that there is ongoing hostility between Jews and Gentiles.

So, what groups is he talking about here? Well notice what he says, the two He's made into one. The two groups are Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. He made those Christians from different backgrounds into one. How did He do that? Well, the second participle explains how He made them one. Notice the second participle at the end of verse 14, "and He broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." This is how Christ made the two groups into one. He broke down the barrier that separated them. Now this is an absolutely fascinating expression. Literally, we could translate it "He broke down the barrier formed by the dividing wall."

Now, it's clear that Paul is talking here about that sort of metaphorical animosity that separated Jews and Gentiles. But to illustrate what that spiritual separation was like, Paul uses an expression taken from the physical temple in Jerusalem. I reminded you last week that there was this massive curtain in the temple that hung between the holy place and the holy of holies, that served as a constant reminder of the barrier between us and God, between all men and God. And when Jesus died, He ripped that curtain in two. Well, there were other barriers at the temple. And they just as profoundly served as a reminder of the division, not between us and God, but between us and others.

Let me see if I can give you a little tour of Herod's temple. It's so important that you understand this to get what Paul is saying here. Herod, for many years, reconstructed the paltry little second temple that was built after the Israelites returned from the Babylonian captivity. And Herod rebuilt it in a massive way. He started by creating a huge raised platform. You'll hear it called the temple mount. It's not really a mountain, more a hill that has been leveled. Dirt has been scraped and leveled until it provides a base for building buildings. So, picture this huge raised platform of earth covered with stone. That is the temple mount. Josephus describes that temple hill, that raised platform of about 400 yards by 330 yards. It was massive, 35 acres approximately, of space, was the temple area on which the buildings were constructed. The chief focal point of that massive temple mount, that temple hill, that raised platform; the chief focal

point was in the center near the back. That's where the temple proper stood, the building that was the temple itself. It was, at the front, 50 yards high by 50 yards wide. A massive structure. If you walked into that structure, you would come into what was called the holy place. And near the back of that huge building would be a small room--only thirty feet by thirty feet by thirty feet, a perfect cube, near the back, separated by a massive curtain. That was the Holy of Holies. That's where the ark of the covenant was. That's where the presence of God manifested Himself.

So, if you were to then be a priest, and you were allowed to be in the holy place serving God, walk with me for a moment from the Holy Place inside that structure at the temple mount. Walk out to the porch of that temple. From the porch, looking out over the rest of the temple mount, you would have seen a cascading, descending set of courtyards. They would have flowed down from where you were standing. From the porch of the Holy Place there were twelve steps leading down to where the brazen altar was, where the bronze altar was, and that area called the court of the priests. This is an area that only the priests could go. This is where the slaughter area for the animals was. This is where the animals were slain and where their corpses were burned, there in fire on the altar. It was called the court of the priests because only the priests could go there.

At the edge of that court there was an eighteen-inch stone wall. Just a tiny little wall, but a reminder that only the priests could enter that court. Just outside of that eighteen-inch wall was another court called the court of Israel. This is where, if you were a Jewish male, you could come. So, you could come very close to where all of the sacrifices were made, to where the altar was, to where the priests were, but you could not enter. That stone wall reminded you there was a barrier between you and the role the priests had.

If you then stood in the court of Israel, that court surrounding the court of the priests, and remember those were on the same level, there was just that tiny little stone wall separating them. If you were to stand where all the Jewish males could come, and look down, you would come to fifteen more steps. If you stepped down those fifteen steps, you would come to that huge square called the court of the women. This was as far as rabbinical law allowed women to come. Later, there were balconies built where they could go up and look down on the area of the court of the priests and watch what was happening, but they could not enter. They could not come up those fifteen steps into the court of Israel where the men could, nor certainly into the court of the priests.

Now, from the women's court, you would descend another five steps to a level area, a kind of landing. Picture a small landing that encompassed the entire temple proper. And on that landing was a wall, a stone wall. That's all that was on the landing, all the way around the temple. That stone wall, we're told, varies somewhere between three feet height and five feet high. The records differ on its height, but they both agree to its presence, and it encompassed the entire temple proper. Now, after that landing, with its wall, there were fourteen more steps. And only after you'd gone down those steps did you reach the area called the court of the Gentiles. That's as far as a non-Jewish person could ever go. But I want you, in your mind as we take our little tour here, I want you to go back up from the court of the Gentiles, back up those fourteen steps to that little landing with its strange wall. It's a very important wall. On that three to five-foot stone barricade that encircled the entire temple building, there were stone slabs placed at regular intervals. And on those slabs was engraved a terrible warning. Several of those engraved signs have been discovered, and one entire slab was discovered back in 1871 and is now on display in a museum in Istanbul, Turkey. This is how it reads. And these signs were at regular intervals all the way around the temple, on that landing, on that three to five-foot wall.

This is what they said. "No Gentile is to enter within the balustrade and embankment around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will render himself liable to the death penalty, which will inevitably follow." You see, the Romans had allowed the Jewish leadership to actually carry out the death penalty on any Gentile who passed that wall. That was the dividing wall. That was the place that you could not go past, even if you were a devout Gentile, even if you were a proselyte, even if you did everything Jewish people did. You couldn't go past that wall on that landing.

It's clear that Paul had that wall in mind when he wrote that Christ had broken down the barrier of the dividing wall. And this is a very important thing to understand. Remember where Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians from? He wrote it from Rome. He wrote it from house arrest in Rome. And here's what's remarkable. The reason Paul was in jail in Rome was because of that wall, and because of that sign, because of that warning. It was about three years before Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus, that Paul had gone to Jerusalem with offerings that had been collected in Gentile churches in Asia Minor, including the church in Ephesus. And he'd taken these offerings to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. But when he got to Jerusalem, Paul discovered there were problems between the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers. Turn back to Acts 21. I want to show you this, Acts 21. This is so important because this is what informs what we're studying in Ephesians. Ephesians takes its cues from this historical context. Acts 21:17. Around Pentecost, we arrived in Jerusalem, Luke writes:

... the brethren received us gladly. And the following day Paul went in with us to James [that's the half-brother of Christ] and all the elders were present.

These are those men the apostles had picked to lead the Jerusalem church, as the apostles had to travel for various evangelistic purposes. They left these men in charge, the elders of the church there in Jerusalem.

After he greeted them, he *began* to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they *began* glorifying God; and they said to him. "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law;

Now understand, these are true Jewish brothers. They are not Judaizers. That is, they are not those who believe you have to do these things in order to earn your salvation. Instead, they are simply Jews, and, until the book of Hebrews was written, Jews in the New Testament continued to practice the ceremonial law spelled out in Moses' time. And so, they are zealous for the law. Verse 21,

"and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews [Paul] who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs." [Again, we're talking about Jewish believers.] "What, then, is *to be done*? They will certainly hear that you have come. "Therefore [here's the plan] do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them."

Stop there. Now why does Paul need to be purified? Well, in the Rabbinical literature, if you were a Jewish male and you traveled into Gentile countries, which Paul has been doing as a missionary for some time, you rendered yourself ceremonially unclean. So, there was a seven-day purification process that you had to go through. "... purify yourself along with them, [verse 24] and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; ..."

This was part of the process, and by paying their expenses to do this for the sacrifice and the other things that would be offered, Paul was showing his piety, that he really was interested in the Mosaic law and in the rabbinical rules. He was still a practicing Jew.

“and all will know that there is nothing to the things that they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.”

We talked about this a couple of Sunday nights ago. These were things all connected to idolatry. The last word there, fornication, probably doesn't mean the broadest scope of fornication. That's forbidden for Jew and Gentile. It probably is referring to close intermarriage with close family members as was practiced among the Gentiles, but would have been a great offense to the Jewish believers. So, Paul agrees. Verse 26, he "... took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them."

Here's how the process went. You went in on the first day, and you let them know what you were going to do. You prepared for the sacrifice. You were also supposed to come back on the third day of the seven, and on the seventh day, back to the temple, and this was part of the process of this purification. So, Paul has agreed to do it, and he follows through with it, verse 27.

When the seven days were almost over [this is probably the seventh day when he had to go back to the temple--this was the rule] the Jews from Asia [probably from Ephesus as we'll see in a moment] upon seeing him in the temple [these are unbelieving Jews now, seeing Paul in the temple] *began* to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.

Here was the heart of the accusation. Paul has defiled the temple because he has brought Gentiles past the wall. "For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple."

Wrongly, but that's what they thought. Paul has brought this Gentile Christian from Ephesus into the temple, into the court of Israel where he would have gone as a Jewish male, and he's brought a Gentile with him. He's violated the temple. He brought a Gentile past the dividing

wall. And where was this Gentile from? He was from the church in Ephesus. A riot breaks out. Paul has to be rescued. Look at verse 30.

Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, [out of the court of Israel, there. They're taking him out, but they shut the doors where they couldn't go outside the temple hill.] While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the *Roman cohort*"

Overlooking the temple mount was a Roman fortress called the Fortress Antonia, looking out over the temple mount so they could keep order when there were hundreds of thousands of people there for the various feasts. And they get word, all Jerusalem is in confusion. Verse 32,S

At once ... [this Roman official] took *some* soldiers and centurions, [plural. A centurion oversaw a hundred men, so that means there were at least a couple of hundred soldiers with him, probably more] and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came up ... took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he *began* asking who he was and what he had done.

If you're familiar with the story, you know that Paul eventually asked to speak to the crowd. So, as they're exiting the temple mount, going up the steps to the fortress Antonia, he asked to speak to the crowd. He turns from those steps, and speaks to the crowd that's gathered there. And they listen to him. But let me show you the end of the story. Go over to 22:17. As he finishes telling his story to this crowd, verse 17 says,

"It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance," [This is one of six times in the book of Acts, Paul is especially communicated to by the Spirit, this is not normative for us, Paul was an apostle.] "and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.' And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" [Notice how they respond to that last sentence.]

Verse 22, they listened to him up to this statement, and *then* they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!” And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air,”

We don’t know if they were just completely worked up or if they were preparing to stone him, or possibly both. There was this animosity toward the Gentiles, and what really threw them over the edge is when Paul said that God Himself had said that He cared about, and wanted to reach out to the Gentiles. That was too much. So, the animosity and the hostility caused by that dividing wall was graphic in Paul’s mind. It was the reason he was in prison in Rome. And you can bet, when Trophimus, from the church in Ephesus, returned home, he had a story to tell to the church in Ephesus. And you can be sure that that incident undoubtedly has raised tensions among the Jewish and Gentile believers in the churches.

That wall in the temple was a constant physical reminder of the spiritual animosity separating Jews and Gentiles. Just like the Berlin wall of the last century. There was a wall of incredible hatred and contempt between these two groups. To the Jews, Gentiles were unclean dogs, with whom even passing contact rendered you defiled. But it didn’t go just one way. To the Gentiles, Jews were “quote” enemies of the human race. One ancient writer said that the Jews were filled with a hostile disposition toward everybody.

This week I was reading a little bit of the Roman historian Tacitus’s histories. He wrote “the Jewish religion is tasteless and mean. All their customs, which are at once perverse and disgusting, owe their strength to their very badness.” That’s how the Romans thought of the Jews. You remember Pilate in the trial of Jesus? He says, what am I, a Jew? And you can just hear the sarcasm dripping from his words. In Acts 16, in Philippi, when they brought Paul and Silas to the chief magistrates they said, these men are Jews, and they have thrown our whole city into confusion. So, in the ancient world, there was this settled and mutual hatred between Jews and Gentiles.

But Paul writes the church in Ephesus, a church that has been deeply affected by that physical wall in the temple, and he told them that by the ministry of Christ, Christ has broken down the spiritual wall of hostility symbolized by that physical wall in the temple. He broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.

As we saw last week, reconciliation with God is foundational. But where there is true reconciliation with God, there is also reconciliation with other people. Ephesians 2 shows us that Christ brings peace with God, and He brings peace between people. Where Christ is truly known, there is an end to the hostility, no matter how deeply ingrained it may be. You know, the alienation and hostility that we experience toward others has many different causes. National boundaries cause that. That's why there are wars between countries. Ingrained cultural differences, from the foods we eat to how we keep our homes, to the different languages we speak. Racial differences are major causes of division and hostility. This is a pandemic problem, the most pronounced example today is certainly the animosity between the Jews and the Arabs. But it's present everywhere. Whether black or white or Hispanic or Asian, whatever it is, we are prone to be hostile because of the differences in race.

Religious differences are the saddest cause of all of the hostility that exists in our world. At any given moment in the world's history, religious differences lie behind open conflict. Whether you want to go back a few years to the extended conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, or right now between the Sunnis and the Shiites, Jews and Muslims. But regardless of what causes it, the hostility, the alienation, is a constant reality. What Paul is saying here, is that where there is Christ, where there are believers, where Christ is truly loved, there is an end to the hostility that disfigures all of mankind. Instead of war with God, we have peace with God. Instead of constant hostility with others, Christians experience peace with others as well.

Perhaps the most beautiful and compelling story of that I've ever read comes from the pen of a man named Tim Kimmel. He tells the story that shortly after the turn of the last century Japan invaded Korea. They overwhelmed the Koreans with a brutality that would sicken the strongest of stomachs. Their crimes against women and children were inhuman. In fact, there are many Koreans alive today who still bear the physical and emotional scars of the Japanese occupation of the last century. One group that was singled out especially for persecution during that time was Christians. They started by refusing to allow churches to meet. One pastor specially entreated his local Japanese police chief for permission to meet for services, and his nagging was finally accommodated, and the police chief offered to unlock the church for one service.

Well, it didn't take long for word to travel. Committed Christians, absolutely starved for an opportunity for unhindered worship, quickly made their plans. Long before dawn on that promised Sunday, Korean families throughout a wide area made their way to that little church.

The Korean church has always had a reputation as a singing church, and that Sunday morning, the voices of praise could not be contained within that little wood frame building. Song after song rang out through the open windows into that bright Sunday morning. It was during a stanza of *Nearer My God to Thee* that the Japanese police chief waiting outside gave the orders. The people toward the back of the church could hear when they barricaded the doors, but no one realized that they had doused the entire church with kerosene, until they smelled the smoke. There was an immediate rush for the open windows, but their momentary hope recoiled in horror as the men attempting to climb out the windows fell back, their bodies riddled with bullets.

So, the pastor knew that it was the end. With a calm that only comes from the Spirit of God, he led his congregation in a hymn. Words were a fitting farewell to earth and a loving salutation to heaven. The first few words he started to sing was all the prompting the terrified congregation needed, and they all joined in with one heart and voice. The smoke burning their eyes, death before them, they instantly joined as one to sing of their hope and to leave their legacy. Just before the roof collapsed, they sang the last verse of a familiar hymn. Their words were an eternal testimony to their faith. "But drops of grief can never repay the debt of love I owe. Here, Lord, I give myself away, 'tis all that I can do. At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light, and the burden of my heart rolled away. It was there by faith I received my sight, and now I am happy all the day."

The strains of music and the wails of children were lost in a roar of flames. The souls of those who left singing here, finished their chorus in the throne of God. The Koreans built a monument on that site to memorialize the people who died, and to serve as a sort of mute reminder of their pain. Many years later, the first glimmer of hope came. It was 1972, and a group of Japanese pastors were traveling through Korea. They came upon the memorial. When they read the details of the tragedy, they read the names of their brothers and sisters who had perished, they were overcome with shame. And they returned to Japan, committed to trying in their small way to right the wrong that had been done.

They began to collect money, and in a short period of time there was an outpouring of love, and \$25,000 had been collected. The money was transferred through the proper channels, and a beautiful white church building was erected on the site of the tragedy. When the dedication service for the new building was held, a delegation from Japan joined the relatives of those who had lost their lives there. Although their generosity was acknowledged, and their attempts at peace were appreciated, the memories were still there. The Korean bitterness had festered for decades. Christian brothers or not, these Japanese were descendants of a ruthless enemy.

Speeches were made. The details of the tragedy were recalled. The names of the dead were honored. Someone in charge of the agenda thought it would be a good idea to close the service out by singing the hymn which they had died singing. “At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light, and the burden of my heart rolled away.”

During the singing of that hymn, one Korean brother turned toward a Japanese brother, and then another, and another, and soon the floodgates opened, and a wave of emotion let go. The Koreans met their new Japanese friends in the middle. They clung to each other. They wept. The Japanese crying tears of repentance, and the Koreans tears of forgiveness. As Kimmel writes, heaven had sent the gift of reconciliation to a little white church in Korea.

Listen, the message of Paul in Ephesians 2 is that in spite of former hostilities, in spite of real differences, there can be peace between brothers and sisters in Christ. Whatever the walls that divide us, Christ has broken them down. Look at Galatians 3. This is how Paul puts it in another letter. Galatians 3:28, he says,

“... you are all sons of God through faith ..., ... 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.”

Obviously, this doesn't erase the various roles we've been given, but this is what Paul was saying. Whatever the differences are here that divide us, those have been done away with in Christ, and we have been made to enjoy unity and equality before God. Christ has broken down the racial and ethnic walls. It doesn't matter if you're Jew or Gentile. It doesn't matter the color of your skin. We can worship and serve together, and genuinely love each other. He's broken down the national walls. Japanese and Korean can worship together. American and Indian and Mexican, whatever it may be. He's broken down the cultural walls. It doesn't matter if you're from a Hispanic culture or an African-American culture, or a Southern culture or a Northern culture, the LA culture or the Dallas culture. None of it matters.

Christ has broken down the social walls. Notice he says both slave and free. It doesn't matter what your social distinctions may be, rich or poor, socially elite or social outcasts, academic intellectual or illiterate. Whatever our social differences, we can worship Christ together as equals before God. Christ has demolished the wall that sometimes exists between the sexes. Paul includes it here in Galatians 3. While they still have their appointed roles, both men and women can find spiritual equality and unity in Christ, in spite of the differences that exist.

Listen, wherever there is ongoing hostility between Christians who embrace the true Christ and the true gospel and the true Scripture, there is sin. Let me ask you this question. Is there anyone with whom you have to admit, or with whom others would say, you have a hostile relationship? If the answer to that is yes, then there are only three options.

Either you're not genuinely in Christ, and you've not experienced the peace of God yourself, or you have lived in ignorance of what Christ expects and demands of you, or you're living in open rebellion to what He commands. He Himself is our peace. He has broken down the barrier of all the dividing walls. It's true now in the church, however imperfect it may be. Someday there will be perfect reconciliation with others regardless of the things that divide us here.

I love what John says in Revelation 5 as he saw there in that heavenly throne room the praise of the people of God. Listen to what he says. Revelation 5:9, ... they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood ... [people] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." [Folks, it doesn't matter the things that could potentially divide us here. In the church, the walls have been broken down, and we are one.]

Next week, we'll look at the third participle that rounds out the work of Christ to bring our reconciliation, but let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for this rich passage. We thank You that Christ is our peace. Not only with You but with each other. And those things that divide us here, that can be as real as walls, like the real dividing wall was at the temple, Father, we're thankful that in Christ, those walls have been torn down. I thank You that in this church, You have brought diversity of various kinds.

Lord, help us to appreciate that, and help us to live together as brothers and sisters in Christ, who genuinely love each other, because You have torn down the walls, and You have united us in our Savior.

It's in His name that we pray. Amen.