

Ephesians
He Himself Is Our Peace (Part 3)
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Tom Pennington, Pastor
Countryside Bible Church

If you picked up your newspaper this morning, you were reminded, just in the first section, of the reality that we live in a world that is characterized by strife and hostility. Whether you're talking about at the individual level, the relationships between people, or whether you're talking about the relationships between countries, our world is characterized by strife and hostility. This last month I read an example, a tragic example really, from the life of the great poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. You may not be aware of her situation. A childhood accident caused her to be a semi-invalid for a large portion of her life before she married Robert Browning in 1846. In her youth, Elizabeth's father was an absolute tyrant. He decided that he wouldn't allow any of his children to marry. And so, when she and Robert Browning were married, their wedding was held in secret because of her father's disapproval. After the wedding, the Brownings sailed to Italy where they lived for the rest of their lives together.

Even though her parents disowned her, however, Elizabeth still sought them out. She still tried to reach them. She never gave up on the relationship, and they tell us that almost weekly she wrote letters to them. Not once did they reply. After about a ten-year period, she received a large box in the mail, and inside that box Elizabeth found every one of her letters. Not one of them had ever been opened. Today, those letters are among the most beautiful and classical English literature, along, of course, with the letters that were exchanged between her and her husband Robert. If her parents had only read a few of those letters, the relationship between them might have been reconciled. It might have been restored and re-established, but sadly, because of the hostility, the animosity, the strife that is part of a fallen world, that relationship never was.

It's even sadder, I think, that that kind of animosity can even occur among those who call themselves Christians. I've shared examples with you from the past, and probably my two favorite examples from my own personal experience. I remember watching two adult professing Christian men, one of them the chairman of the deacon board, almost come to blows at a Wednesday evening business meeting at the church in which I grew up, over the placement of the piano in the sanctuary. And my father-in-law knew of a church where the members argued so much about the color of the roof shingles that they ended up, the only way they could resolve it, was to put one color of shingle on one side of the roof and the other color on the other side.

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But that's not the worst of it. Each group then sat under the side of the roof that was the color of their shingles.

There are many other examples that aren't nearly so humorous. Why is there conflict and hostility in our world? If I were to ask you that question, why is there hostility and conflict between individuals as well as between countries, why is that so pandemic in human society? What would you say? Well, obviously, the short answer is sin. But if you were to examine it a little more closely, you would find that what lies behind strife and arguing and hostility at every level is always the same sin. It is ultimately the sin of pride. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it like this. He said,

man, each man, sets himself up as a god. He thinks he is an autonomous being. And he has the right to rule. He is constantly revolving around himself. He is the center. But unfortunately, all men are doing the same thing, and that's where the trouble comes in. If I alone existed there would be no trouble" Have you noticed that you never get into fights with other people if you're alone? It's because your pride is not in any way affected. Because you can rule. But Lloyd-Jones goes on to say "But every other "I" is exactly the same as I am. The result is that the world is peopled by a number of gods, all asserting themselves, and all demanding their rights and claiming the same things. It is inevitable [he says] that there should therefore be clashes.

When your pride and my pride clash, there is strife, and there is hostility. Tragically, because of human pride, hostility between people is and always will be part of life in a fallen world. Perhaps this morning, you know someone whose relationships resemble that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Or perhaps you have experienced the same kind of hostility in your own life. Maybe, even right now, as you sit in this room this morning, you find yourself in a settled state of hostility with a spouse or with a family member, with a lifelong friend, with a fellow church member, with a neighbor, with a co-worker. Listen, that kind of hostility must not live in the hearts of the people who know Jesus Christ. That's the point Paul wants us to understand in Ephesians 2. I invite you to turn there with me again this morning.

Ephesians 2. Because in the second half of this chapter that we're studying together, in verses 11 through verse 22 of the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul explains for us this basic theme; that 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 several distinct

sections. The first section is verses 11 through 13, the reality of the union that we enjoy. And we looked at that passage together. The second section is verses 14-18, and here we learned the reasons for the union. Let me read it again for you. Ephesians 2:14-18, the second section that we find ourselves in the middle of. Verse 14,

“For He Himself [that is Christ 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 little section is permeated by the concept of reconciliation, of peace with God and peace with each other. We have been united, there is a union between us and God, and between us and other believers. Verses 11-13 describe the “reality” of that union, and the verses I just read for you, verses 14-18, describe the “reasons” for that union, the reasons God caused us to be reconciled with Himself and with each other.

Paul here offers for us two basic reasons, two basic causes. The first is the ministry of Christ in verses 14-16. And the second reason is the message of Christ, in verses 17 and 18. Look at the first cause, or the first reason, “the ministry of Christ.” Verses 14-16 focus on what Christ has done. It’s summarized at the beginning of verse 14, “for He Himself is our peace.” What does that mean? Well, Paul explains it for us in three parallel Greek participles. Those Greek participles are translated in our English text as “made” in verse 14, “broke down” at the end of verse 14, and “abolishing” at the beginning of verse 15. Those are all three parallel expressions. These three participles explain what it means that Christ has become our peace, that He has reconciled us to God and to each other.

We looked last week at the first participle, He made both groups into one, verse 14. This is the peace Christ made. He made both groups, that is Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, into one group. The second participle is: “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. As I explained to you last time, there was at the temple, surrounding the entire temple building proper where the Holy of Holies was and the Holy Place, there were a series of steps

that led down away from that building, and halfway down the steps there was a landing. Nothing else on the landing but a wall. And that wall wrapped all the way around the temple building. And on that three to five foot (and the historical records vary on the height of it) but on that three foot to five-foot wall, that marble wall, there were stone slabs placed at various intervals. And engraved on those stone slabs was a terrible warning. It was a warning to all foreigners, all Gentiles, to go no farther or to suffer the death penalty. Paul had that wall in mind when he wrote that Christ has broken down the barrier of the dividing wall. In fact, as we saw last week, the reason Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem, as it's recorded in the books of Acts, was because he was accused of ignoring that wall and those warnings, and taking a Gentile into the sacred area of the temple where only Jewish men were allowed. So, the message of Paul in Ephesians 2 is that in spite of former hostilities, in spite of very real differences, even differences as deep as that between Jew and Gentile, there can be, there must be peace between brothers and sisters in Christ. Whatever walls divide us, Christ has broken them down.

Now that brings us to the third participle where he continues to explain how Jesus has become our peace. The third participle comes at the beginning of verse 15: "By abolishing in His flesh the enmity which is the law of commandments contained in ordinances."

Now that's a little hard for us to digest, but it's a very important expression to understand. Here, he's telling us, the way Jesus brought us peace with others: "by abolishing." Now, the Greek word that's translated "abolishing" here means literally "to make ineffective." "To nullify." "To abolish or to set aside." What did Jesus make ineffective? What did He set aside or abolish? Notice the object of this verb is the enmity. He abolished the enmity, "the hostility" is another way to define that word. He abolished the hostility, specifically the hostility that was created by the law of the commandments contained in decrees. What does the 'law of the commandments contained in decrees'? It's clear from the similar passages, as we'll see in a moment, that Paul here means the Mosaic Law. Paul is talking about the law of God given at Sinai to the people of Israel. In a very real sense, (listen carefully to this) in a very real sense the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile was not that marble wall of the temple. The real dividing wall was the Mosaic Law. That's what separated Jews and Gentiles.

You say, well how did the Mosaic Law do that? How did the Mosaic Law create hostility? How did it divide? Well, it did so in a couple of ways. First of all, it separated the Jews from all the other peoples on earth. The Mosaic Law was, in some ways, intended to do that. It was intended to make them distinct, to make them different, to make a distinction between the Jewish people and their neighbors. The Law was intended to make the difference clear so that they could then

be a voice for God, so that they could declare God to the nations. But instead of those ceremonial laws making them distinct, the Jews misunderstood them. And soon, instead of seeing them as something that made them distinct, that allowed them to declare the true God to the nations, they became a badge of honor. They became a source of isolation. The Law became a fence around Israel.

Here's how one Jewish writer put it 200 years before Christ. The epistle of Aristeus explains it this way. "Our lawgiver fenced us about with impenetrable palisades and with walls of iron to the end that we should mingle in no way with any of the other nations." That's how they saw the Law. It was to absolutely isolate them from the rest of the people on earth. There were all of those special feasts. There were forbidden foods. There were designated fasts. There were offerings and sacrifices that had to be offered constantly. There was circumcision. And on and on the list goes, and all of those ceremonial requirements of the Mosaic Law, from what they ate to how they worshiped, created enmity or hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles.

Because the Jews used them to isolate themselves and to look down on the Gentiles, the Gentiles sensed that, experienced that, looked at the strangeness of what the Jews did, and it became a source of isolation, a source of hostility. But Paul here says, Jesus rendered null and void all of those ceremonial decrees. Christ made Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians one, and He did it by breaking down the wall that divided them, and that wall was the ceremonial part of Mosaic Law. Jesus rendered that ineffective. He nullified it.

You say, well what about the hostility the law created between us and God. How did the Mosaic Law create hostility there? I understand how it could have created hostility between the Jews and their neighbors. But how did the Mosaic Law create hostility between us and God? Now, I don't have time, unfortunately, to take you through an entire study of the Law of God. We'll do that at some point, but let me just say this. While, nowhere in the Bible does the Bible divide the Mosaic Laws, the laws given at Sinai, into categories of moral and ceremonial and civil, nevertheless in the New Testament, those parts of the Mosaic Law are treated differently. And I'll show you that in just a moment. And so, it is legitimate to say that there were aspects of that Law given to Moses at Sinai that was "civil," that is, pertaining to the rule of the government of the country. Paul, in Romans 13 says that civil aspect of the Law has now been handed over to secular governments. He was writing to the Romans, telling them to submit to the governments around them, and to submit even to the carrying out of penalties by that government. There was a "ceremonial" aspect of the law. Jesus has nullified that. There was also, in the Law of Moses, what is called the "moral" law of God. That is, those timeless moral requirements of God that do

not change, because they are reflections of His eternal character. They are outlined in the ten commandments. And in fact, all of the ten commandments except one are reiterated as binding in the New Testament.

You see (and that's by the way the law of the Sabbath) Jesus did not come to abolish the law, (Matthew 5). He came to fulfill it. He came to fill it out. He came to keep it. In fact, Paul says in Romans 7, as a believer, that he delights in the law of God in the inner man. So, when we come to the moral law contained in the Law of Moses, outlined by the ten commandments, those moral requirements created real hostility between us and God, because we didn't keep them. God said, you shall not bear false witness, and we bear false witness. God said you shall not steal, and we still steal. God says you shall have no other gods before Me, and our hearts, as John Calvin says, are idol-factories. All we can do is produce other gods and worship them. And so, over and over again, we have broken it, and that has created hostility between us and God. Jesus came, not to completely set aside the moral law. They're still God's expectations of us. As I said, every one of them is reiterated in the New Testament with the exception of the law of the Sabbath, and we're told instead to worship God on Sunday.

But Jesus came to change our relationship to the moral law. Because God's moral law condemned us, but Jesus removed the condemnation that our violation of God's moral law produced. So, here's what Paul means in verse 15. He means that Jesus abolished the hostility the ceremonial law created between Jews and Gentiles, and Jesus also abolished the hostility the moral law created between us and God. John Stott puts it this way. "Jesus abolished both the regulations of the ceremonial law and the condemnation, the guilty verdict, of the moral law." Now, let me see if I can make it a little clearer for you. Turn to Colossians 2 because here Paul uses both of these aspects of the law as he talks about the work of Christ. Colossians 2 and notice verse 13. You'll notice this, by the way. Colossians was written around the same time as the letter to the church at Ephesus. It's parallel in many ways and you'll see similar expressions here. As we go through Ephesians I'll often refer to Colossians because there are so many similarities. Notice what he says in 2:13. "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him..."

You'll notice immediately the similarities with Ephesians 2. Then he says, "having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt." Stop there. In the ancient world, if you became indebted to someone, you wrote up what was essentially a formalized IOU. In your own handwriting, you wrote what you owed, and you signed that you owed it. You gave it to the person to whom you owed it. It was a way they could demand that payment from you.

So, there was this certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us. Here, he's talking about the moral law of God. You and I violated God's moral requirements and He has every right, then, to call our debt. And we don't have the resources to pay it. But Jesus cancelled out the certificate of our debt. The picture is of wiping ink off of a page. It was hostile to us. He has taken it out of the way, and He did so by having it nailed to the cross. By the way, there's a beautiful word picture there. In the ancient world, when someone was crucified, what they were guilty of was placed on the cross. You remember, in our Lord's crucifixion, this is "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," but usually it was what they were accused of. In His case, of course, that is what He was accused of, being a king in opposition to Caesar, in opposition to the God of Israel. And so, in Jesus' case, He's pictured here as having our certificate of debt, that handwriting of ours that says we owe God obedience and we've failed to keep it. That was nailed to His cross. He was accused of that, and He died for your failure to keep the law of God. That's the moral aspect of the law. But notice in the same context, Paul goes on to deal with the ceremonial aspect. Verse 16, [Because of what Christ did,]

... no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

He says, listen, those ceremonial things that were part of the Mosaic Law, they're done away with. Don't let anybody judge you in those things. You don't have to do those things any more. Here's why. Notice verse 17. (By the way, I don't like the translation here in verse 17) Literally, the Greek text says this. "Things which are a ... shadow of what is to come, but the body belongs to Christ." You know what he's saying? He's saying, you go back to the Old Testament, you look at all those ceremonial laws. Those were like the shadow Christ cast across the Old Testament. It's like Christ's shadow. But when His body shows up, you don't want His shadow any more. The reality is here. Turn loose of the shadows and embrace the true and living Christ.

So, Christ, then, canceled our debt to God for violating the moral law, and He canceled our responsibility to God regarding the ceremonial aspects of the law. So, the best way to think about what Paul is saying in Ephesians 2:15 is this. The Mosaic covenant as a law covenant was rendered null and void, and now both Jew and Gentile Christians live under the New Covenant. He's brought peace with God and peace with each other. That's what Paul means when he says Christ has become our peace. Now, why did Christ do this? Why did He become our peace? Paul explains it to us back in Ephesians 2. You'll notice in the middle of verse 15, the little

words “so that.” Those words speak of divine purpose. Here’s why Christ became our peace. And he gives us two reasons. First of all, to make peace between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Verse 15. “... so that in Himself, He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace.”

Folks, here is the new math of the church. One plus one equals one. Jewish Christians plus Gentile Christians equals one new entity. And what is that entity? The church. Verses 19-22 are going to touch on that, but when we get to 3:1-13, Paul is going to explain this in great detail.

But you need to understand this expression. Verse 15, “one new man.” He’s talking about the church. And that statement is crucial to understanding the nature of the church. “one new man.” First of all, it means it’s been “created” by God. The word “made” in verse 15 is a very interesting Greek word. It’s only used in the New Testament of God creating the world, or of God re-creating a soul. It’s an act of God where something is made out of nothing. It’s a creation of God, the church is. Verse 15 tells us that. He made “one new man.” That also means that Old Testament Israel, listen carefully, was not the church. It’s a new man. It’s a new entity. It means that Jews and the New Testament church are not going to be forever distinct, as some classic dispensationalists would have us believe. Because the two now merge into one entity. As Jews become Christians in today’s world, they become part of the church along with Gentiles. And this new entity centers on the person of Jesus Christ Himself. Notice it says “in Himself.” So, Christ then abolished our condemnation because of the moral law. He abolished the ceremonial law so that in the church, He could create a new entity.

Turn over to Galatians 3. Notice how Paul puts it in his earliest letter. This was the very first letter Paul wrote in the New Testament era. It’s not the first letter that was written in the New Testament. That was probably James’ letter. But it was the first letter Paul wrote. Galatians 3, and notice verse ’23. “But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law...” Before we actually believed, before you believed you were held in custody under the law, you were shut up to the faith which was later revealed to you. So, the law was like a tutor that led you to Christ. Your conscience convicted you of sin, and pointed you to your need of somebody to rescue you. Verse 25,

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor, For you are all sons of God” [Once you came to embrace Christ, you become a son of God] through faith in Christ. ... All of you ... were baptized into Christ. [There’s no water in this verse, by the way, this word means immersed. You were all, at the moment

of salvation, baptized, or immersed, into Christ.] Verse 28, [That means, because we're all one in 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.

Now this doesn't mean that those things don't exist anymore. Obviously, there are males sitting here, and there are females sitting here. What he means is, they don't matter anymore. Yes, the roles that we have assigned by God continue, but spiritually, we are all equal before God. We are on a level playing field. You remember the temple with its descending courts? It's been leveled and the walls have been erased. We can all approach God spiritually equal, in spite of those distinctions. By making redeemed Jews and Gentiles part of this one new entity, he has established peace between them. By the way, this is the only hope for the animosity that exists between Jews and Gentiles. Or for that matter, the animosity and hostility that exists for any reason. Look back at verse 28. Whether you're talking about race, or whether you're talking about national differences, or cultural differences, or social differences, or even, verse 28, the differences between men and women. Ultimately the only way there can be peace between people, the only way the walls can be broken down is in the church of Jesus Christ, and through Christ.

I've seen this myself, personally. In the church I've seen the wealthiest people I know ministering and serving alongside the poorest people I know. I've seen people with doctorates and advanced degrees ministering with those who don't have a high school diploma. I've seen, in various countries, I've had the opportunity to minister in and to fellowship with Christians in India, and Australia, and New Zealand, and Russia, and the Ukraine, and Singapore, and Indonesia, and the Philippines, and Israel, and Italy, and England. And where I go, we're different in many different ways, perhaps racially or nationally or socially or culturally. But in Christ, none of those differences matter. We can gather like this and worship our Lord together. Those differences are done away with. All the things that divide us are broken down in the church.

There's a second purpose that Christ had by becoming our peace. Go back to verse 15 of Ephesians 2. Pick up that expression, "so that." He told us so that He might make the two into one new man. Verse 16, He does it not only to make peace with one another, but to bring peace with God. Look at verse 16: "and might reconcile them both in one body to God." He wanted to reconcile us "to God, through the cross, by it having put to death the hostility between us and God" So, in other words, when you look at Ephesians 2:14 and 15 shows us how Christ brings peace between people on the horizontal level.

Beginning in verse 16 and running through verse 18, Paul shows us how Christ brings peace between us and God, vertically. But look at the emphasis of verse 16. “that He might reconcile them both in one body to God.” By “both,” he means Gentiles and Jews. Now tell me, what does that assume? If both Jews and Gentiles need to be reconciled to God, that means they both were what? strangers to God, alienated from God. It reminds me of what Paul says in Romans 3, where he says what then, are we Jews better than they Gentiles? Not at all, for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin. Now, think about this. Stay with me. The Law not only separated Jews from Gentiles, and it not only separated Gentiles from Israel’s God, but the Law separated Israel from God, because they could never obey it. So we all, regardless of our background, have the same problem, and we’re all reconciled to God the same way. Christ has reconciled us both, notice He says, in one body. That is, in the church.

How did Christ do this? How did He make this peace between us and God? How did he make this peace between us and others? By what means did He bring peace? Well, there are, running through this passage, a series of prepositional phrases that identify the means God used. Look at verse 15: “... in His flesh ... also in verse 15, “in Himself” and then clearer, verse 16, “through the cross.” Do you understand that Jesus bought peace for you? He bought peace with God, and He bought peace with other people through the sacrifice of Himself on the cross? Here’s the bottom line. Jesus, through His death on the cross, became the only source of human peace, both peace with God and peace with others. If you ever hope for peace, that’s the only way you’ll get it. So, verses 14-16, he’s given us the first reason, the ministry of Christ. That ministry is the ministry of peace.

But verses 17 and 18 Paul identifies a second reason that this union exists. The second cause. Not only the “ministry” of Christ, but the “message” of Christ. You see, Christ who is our peace and who made peace, now announces peace. In verse 17, His message is peace, and peace that is available to all men regardless of their background. Look at verse 17. He, that is Christ “... HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;” You’ll notice that verse is in all caps. When you see that in your Bible, it means that the translators believe that that is a quotation of an Old Testament passage. In this case, it’s taken from Isaiah 57:19. Paul borrows the wording of Isaiah 57. Often, he is explaining, or exegeting. Here, he borrows the wording, just as we sometimes borrow the wording of Scripture, and take it out of its original meaning. He borrows it here, and changes the meaning. Because, in the Old Testament context, if you look at it there, it’s referring to Jews who were near and Jews who were far away in the dispersion. Here, Paul uses these words to refer to the Jews as near to God, because God was in their midst in the temple, and the Gentiles who were far away from God.

And Jesus preached peace to both. He preached the gospel, in other words. You remember the gospel is called “the gospel of peace” in Ephesians 6. Jesus preached this message of peace, peace with God, peace with others, to both Jews and Gentiles. During His earthly ministry, of course, the primary focus was the Jews.

He Himself said, in Matthew’s gospel, that “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” And yet, Jesus also brought this good news to Gentiles. There are a number of examples of this. You remember in the great commission, Matthew 28. He says, listen the mission doesn’t stop with Israel. I want you to go into all the nations and make disciples. John 1:29, Jesus has come to take away the sin of the world. John 3:16, For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.

In fact, turn over to John’s gospel. Let me show you. There are a couple of very interesting passages. John 10, where John makes this point, that Jesus’ ministry was not restricted to Israel. John 10:15, Jesus says: “I lay down My life for the sheep ...” And then He says this: “I have other sheep which are not of this fold.” In other words, they are not part of the nation of Israel. I have other sheep that are not part of Israel. “I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice.” That’s us, folks “and they will become one flock with one shepherd.” They’ll become one new flock, and I’ll be the shepherd of them both. Over in chapter 11:51, Caiaphas, the high priest you remember had this little prophecy unintentionally about Jesus. And he said, Jesus was going to die for the nation. And John adds this in verse 52. But he’s not going to just die for the nation only, not just for Israel, “but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”

So, you can see already in the ministry of Jesus, there was this mission beyond Israel. And of course, after Jesus’ ascension, He sent His apostles out, and the thrust of their ministry became, in the following years, not only there in Judea, but in Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth, to Gentiles as well as Jews. Jesus preached peace. Paul’s point is this, Christ offered peace with God and peace with others to everybody, regardless of their background.

And notice verse 18: “For through Him, we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.” Jesus announces, not only peace, but He announces access, access to God, available to all Christians regardless of their background. The key word here in verse 18 is the word access. It means the right to enter, or the right to approach. We’ve seen in this passage several allusions to the temple in Jerusalem. This word is also an allusion to the temple. Behind this word is another illustration from the temple in Jerusalem. The verb form of this word “access” occurs often in

the Old Testament, in the Septuagint, in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. And where it's used there, it has the idea of drawing near to God's presence with an offering. When you came to God you were drawing near to God and His presence, you brought an offering. That's what this word meant, how it's used in verb form in the Old Testament. So, the word access has the idea of the right to approach God, the right to approach the place of His presence. Because an offering has been offered, we have "access."

This word is only used three times in the New Testament, and every time it's used, Jesus is our point of access. It's used in Romans 5:2 where it says we have access into forgiveness through Jesus. It's used here in Ephesians 2:18 where Jesus provides access into the presence of the Father. And then the third use, turn over to Ephesians 3 where it's used the third time. I love this one. Ephesians 3:12. "in whom" that is, in Jesus our Lord, "we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him." Literally, we have access in confidence. Jesus provides access into the presence of God with great confidence. It reminds me of what Jesus called Himself in John 10. He said, "I am the door." I'm the way to God. I'm your access point. Or He said, in John 14, "I am the way. No one comes to the Father but by Me." I'm the access.

Notice verse 18 says, Jesus is our access but only through one Spirit. Obviously, that's a reference to the Holy Spirit. In fact, look at verse 18, because all three persons of the Trinity are there. They work together to make our peace. Jesus provides access, but He does that access, or provides that access to the Father through the work of the Spirit. Look back at verse 18 though. I want you to see the main point. Notice, through Jesus, we both have our access. The picture behind these words is that together, all Christians, regardless of what divides us, have the right and confidence to approach the God of the universe, and to approach Him together as Father. The idea here is not that we both have access. But that we both have access together. We approach God as Father together. And our Father makes no distinction between those children who are Jewish by birth and those who are Gentile by birth. What an incredible reality. We have access to God as Father together. The distinctions are gone in Christ.

Now, this has been a wonderful passage, but let me make it very practical for you. How do we apply this profound truth that Christ is our peace, that He has bought our peace with God and our peace with each other? Let me give you, very quickly, three very specific applications.

Number one. Approach God with confidence through Christ. Approach God with confidence through Christ. I love the expressions in Romans 8 and in Galatians 4 where Paul says, here's how you are to approach God. Say Abba, Father. In other words, you can approach the Father

the same way Jesus did. That's how Jesus spoke to the Father. You can speak to the Father just as His own unique Son does. You have access with confidence. Approach God with confidence. Look at Hebrews 10. The writer of Hebrews draws this out beautifully. In Hebrews 10:19, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil" And the veil that was ripped, it was the flesh of Christ. In other words, by His death, He became our entry point to God. Therefore, verse 22, "let us draw near" Listen, folks, you can approach God with confidence because Christ has made peace. But it's not just peace with God and access to Him that's talked of here. The work of Christ at the cross also means peace with one another.

Application number two. Don't allow any of the walls that divide humans to divide you from other Christians. Don't let any of the walls that divide humans divide you from other Christians. Look at Colossians 3. Paul makes this point in the very same context. Colossians 3:10. He says I want you who have put on the new self, you're a new person. And you're now being renewed in a true knowledge of God, in a true knowledge of His will, ultimately into the image of Christ. You're not the person you used to be. And as this new person, verse 11, this renewal you're undergoing, "there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, between circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian [those were two people groups that the Greeks looked down upon as lower than human] slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." Paul is saying, listen, those distinctions, while they are still a reality in the sense you live in the world; in the church, as we have spiritual access to God, those distinctions are done. They don't exist. We are all one in Christ.

It's as if that temple mount that was once cascading with that series of courtyards where people were down looking up and outside looking in, it's as if it's been leveled, and the walls have been knocked down, and we now all have equal access to God. Don't think like humans think. Don't let the walls that divide humans divide you from other Christians, whether we're talking, look at verse 11 there, whether we're talking national boundaries, or racial boundaries, or social boundaries, or cultural boundaries, or in Galatians 3 even the boundaries between men and women. Don't let those walls divide you from other Christians.

Number three, very briefly. A third implication and application, is seek to be reconciled personally with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Seek in your personal relationships to be reconciled to your brothers and sisters in Christ. This week I read a story by Robert Louis Stevenson. The story he tells in his book, *Picturesque Notes of Edinburgh*. There is in Scotland a legend of two unmarried sisters who shared a single room. But they had an intense argument,

these two sisters did, over what Stevenson called some point of controversial divinity. In other words, they argued about theology. And they became so bitter as a result of this argument that they never spoke to each other again. For the rest of their lives, there was only silence. Whether the reason was financial, or whether the reason was their reputation, they continued to live in that same single room. So, they divided the room into two with a simple chalk line on the floor. Stephenson writes it bisected the doorway and the fireplace so that each could go out and in and do her cooking without violating the territory of the other. So, for years they co-existed in a hateful silence, always exposed to an unfriendly scrutiny, and at night, in the dark watches, each could hear the breathing of her enemy. Never did four walls look down upon an uglier spectacle.

Listen, Paul wants us to know that because of the ministry of Christ, because of the message of Christ, because it's a message of peace and a ministry of peace, not only with God but with other people, that the reality that we are united in Christ forces us not to allow unresolved hostility and bitterness to continue in our relationships with one another. Look at Colossians again.

Colossians 3. Notice verse 12. Right after he talks about that union we have in Christ, the walls are broken down. So, in light of that reality, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, treat each other with compassion, with kindness, with humility, gentleness, and patience. And listen, when you interact with people, there are going to be problems. How do you handle it? Verse 13, "bearing with one another and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

Listen, you may be here this morning as a professing Christian, and you may be aware even as you sit here this morning that there is settled hostility, a state of hostility, between you and another professing brother or sister in Christ. Maybe a part of your family, maybe a part of this church, maybe someone across the country or across the world. But you know as you sit here, there is that wall that you have built. If that's true, as Paul says, I speak it to your shame. Because, in Christ, the differences that divide us have been broken down. If that person is a true believer in Jesus Christ, you cannot allow that wall of hostility to remain up. As Jesus urges us in the sermon on the mount. If you go to present your offering, to present your worship to God, and you become aware that your brother has something against you, stop, leave your offering, go make it right with your brother, and then come back and worship. There are probably some people in this room this morning who need to spend some time this afternoon seeking God's forgiveness, and on the phone seeking the forgiveness of someone else. This is what God commands. This is what Christ expects. He has made peace between us and God, and that means He's made peace between us and each other.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for the wonderful truth we've discovered in this chapter, unexpected in many ways, as so often when we study Your Word. A passage seems on the surface reading to be unclear, to be unhelpful, and then when we study it together, by the work of Your Spirit, you open our minds to see it, and it becomes rich and full, powerful in our lives. And Father, I pray that this passage would become that to us.

Lord, help us to approach You with confidence because Christ has made peace. Help us to draw near to You in the Spirit of confidence, not because of us, but because of Him whose flesh has become our access point to You, whose torn body on the cross has become the way we come to You.

Father, I pray that You would help us to tear down the walls that divide in the church. Lord, don't let us allow those walls that divide humans to divide us because Christ has leveled them all. And Father, I pray that if there are those here this morning who find themselves in a state of hostility with other brothers and sisters in Christ, may they not worship again until they make that right. Father, I pray that Your Spirit would work in their consciences to bring a desire to make it right so that they honor what Christ has done at the cross in making peace between us and You, and peace between us and others.

We pray that our church would be a church characterized by the passage we read in Colossians where there is bearing with one another, there is the compassion, there is the gentleness, and the patience, and the forgiveness. May there be this love that becomes a perfect bond of unity.

We pray it in Jesus' name and for His sake and glory. Amen.