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He Is Our Peace

There are four metaphors that Paul uses in Ephesians 2:11-22 to describe what Jesus has done through his sacrifice. There had always been an enmity between the Jewish World and the Gentile World, and the Law of Moses with its ordinances had played a role in separating Jew and Gentile. Jesus came to bring peace and to reconcile both Jew and Gentile in one body. The idea of one body is the first metaphor, and the three others are the kingdom, the family and the building, or dwelling place of God.

Brought Near by the Blood

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Eph. 2:11-13)

There was a physical difference between Jewish men and Gentile men. The Jews practice the rite of circumcision of 8-day old Jewish males. Joseph and Mary took Jesus for circumcision:

"When the eight days until His circumcision had passed, He was named Jesus, the name the angel had given Him before He had been conceived. And when the time of purification according to the Law of Moses was complete, His parents brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord: 'Every firstborn male shall be consecrated to the Lord'), and to offer the sacrifice specified in the Law of the Lord: 'A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.'" Lk. 2:21-24

There were problems in the early church over the Jewish customs including circumcision. Paul was asked by Jewish leaders to pay the expenses of some brothers to show his solidarity with the Jewish believers.

"When we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us joyfully. The next day Paul went in with us to see James, and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them and recounted one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they glorified God. Then they said to Paul, 'You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. But they are under the impression that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe our customs. What then should we do? They will certainly hear that you have come. Therefore do what we advise you. There are four men with us who have taken a vow. Take these men, purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know that there is no truth to these rumors about you, but that you also live in obedience to the law. As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they must abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from



the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality.' So the next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he entered the temple to give notice of the date when their purification would be complete, and the offering would be made for each of them." (Acts 21:17-26)

These differences in customs among Jewish and Gentile Christians were a source of unrest in the church. Paul acknowledges that while they were still immersed in Gentile customs and lifestyle that the Gentile Christians were, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. However, now in Christ those who were far off, that is the Gentiles, were brought near by the blood of Christ. It took some time and teaching for both Jewish and Gentile believers to understand the reconciling power of the blood of Jesus. This concept was new to them, but the truth of the power of the gospel finally prevailed. Jewish and Gentile believers could now be at peace with each other by the blood of Christ.

He Is Our Peace

"For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father." (Eph. 2:14-18)

Jesus made both one and broke down the middle wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile. Even though many Christians believe that the "middle wall" mentioned in this verse is a metaphorical expression used to speak of God's Law, this is far from the truth. The context of this verse lets us know that Paul was speaking of the division of Gentiles and Jews (uncircumcised & circumcised), and how Gentiles had no part in Israel before Messiah. The interesting fact that many Christians are unaware of, is that there was a physical barrier (a middle wall) that separated Gentiles and

Jews in the days of Paul, at the Temple in Jerusalem. Known as the "soreg," this partition prohibited Gentiles from entering the temple courts.

The words written on a sign on the soreg: "No outsider shall enter the protective enclosure around the sanctuary. And whoever is caught will only have himself to blame for the ensuing death." – (Translated by K. C. Hanson & Douglas E. Oakman)

We may remember Paul was accused of having taken a Gentile into the temple courts:

"When the seven days were almost over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, crying out, 'Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches everywhere against our people and against our law and against this place. Furthermore, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.' For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple." (Acts 21:27-29)

"Having abolished in his flesh," Jesus came in the flesh and lived among us. He finally gave himself a sacrifice for sin. This could certainly refer to the crucifixion of Jesus which brought about the New Covenant. He nailed the Old Covenant to his cross.

"Having abolished in his flesh the enmity," "No iron curtain, color bar, class distinction or national frontier of today is more absolute than the cleavage between Jew and Gentile in antiquity." Christ abrogated, annulled, and replaced the entire Jewish system with another institution, that of the New Covenant, in which all former distinctions were canceled. (Coffman)

"The law of commandments contained in ordinances," This refers to the totality of the entire Jewish system of religion and is not restricted in meaning to "the ceremonial law," or any lesser part of Judaism. All that system was nailed to the cross of Christ.

Jesus created one new man, a Christian. It was no longer Jew and Gentile; it was brothers and sisters in Christ, Christians. He reconciles both Jew and

Gentile in one body by the cross. The Body of Christ is his church. It is his kingdom. It is his family. It is his building or dwelling place. It is Spiritual Israel.

He preached peace to those who were afar off, the Gentiles, and to those who were near, the Jews. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ both Jew and Gentile have access by one Spirit to the Father. Again, we emphasize that this is Spiritual Israel. Remember again the words of Paul to the Galatians: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:26-29)

No Longer Strangers

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22)

There is only one Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ is its Lord. The Jews and Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners to one another. They are now fellow citizens. They are all saints in Christ. This is the kingdom metaphor that is used in Scripture to describe our relationship to one another as fellow citizens with Christ as our King.

There is only one family of God and Jesus Christ is the head of that family. We are all members of the household of God. The metaphor of God's people as a family is another one that is found in Scripture.

And then we turn to the metaphor of a building. All good buildings must have a firm and solid foundation. The Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is built on just such a foundation: the apostles, the prophets with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

The foundation is composed of the teaching of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus as God's only begotten son. It portrays Jesus as our Savior, the one who died, was buried, and then rose on the third day from the grave. He is now in heaven where he makes intercession for us. One day he will return and receive us into the heavenly realms where we will dwell eternally.

Collectively this building is a temple of God where his spirit dwells. Paul will go on to talk about the mystery of the church that Jesus came to establish.

(Sources: <https://biblethingsinbi-bleways.wordpress.com/2014/06/12/the-middle-wall-of-partition-misunderstandings-regarding-eph-214-16/>
Burton Coffman Commentary)

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There is only one family of God and Jesus Christ is the head of that family.

And, of course, we begin by thinking it is like two men working together, so that you could say, "He did this bit and I did that." But this way of thinking breaks down. God is not like that. He is inside you as well as outside: even if we could understand who did what, I do not think human language could properly express it. In the attempt to express it different Churches say different things. But you will find that even those who insist most strongly on the importance of good actions tell you you need Faith; and even those who insist most strongly on Faith tell you to do good actions." (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001, pp. 148-149)

Reflections of the Psalms: Psalm 3

Psalm 3 includes a subtitle “A psalm of David. When he fled from Absalom his son”. The event that led to the writing of this psalm may have come from the time when Absalom was trying to take the throne away from his father David. When Absalom began his revolt, many people followed him and rejected David’s rule. Verse 1 described what was happening to David, “O LORD, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me. Many are saying of my soul, ‘There is no deliverance for him in God.’” The reason for the writing of Psalm 3 was simple - betrayal, rejection and humiliation.

Probably no one today can specifically understand what David faced, but most people, most Christians, have faced betrayal and rejection. The actions may have come from a “good” friend, a “close” associate, or a loved one. But the results still lead to pain, shock, disbelief, and anger. Suddenly, an apparently well-ordered life is thrown into turmoil. What was supposed to be the truth turns out to be a lie. So, how does a person deal with this? What is an appropriate response? The world says to strike back, seek revenge, dwell on what happened, feed and nurture the anger and bitterness.

But verses 3-6 show that David’s response was different. “But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the One who lifts my head. I was crying to the LORD with my voice, and He answered me from His holy mountain. I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about.”

Was there an obvious solution to the problems when David wrote this Psalm? No. But in spite of the situation he was facing, David’s faith never wavered. What incredible faith! His words were not a man complaining to God in a petulant manner. In fact, in verses 5-6, he declared that he was still able to sleep in spite of the trials he was facing!

Some people sleep soundly out of ignorance or arrogance. Other people’s spirit has been so seared by sin, that they feel nothing and sleep. But then there are others who sleep because of their confidence in the Lord. How many today can make that claim? How many Christians, upon experiencing

even a small amount of what David was describing, could echo his words?

Remember the words that James wrote in James 1:2-4, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” How many Christians intellectually understand what the words say, but do not believe that they really work? Yet, the foundation of a Christian’s spiritual strength is faith in the Father and His Son - Jesus Christ. And that faith grows and matures through prayer.

How many Christians intellectually understand what the words say, but do not believe that they really work?

David’s words were inspired, but he had no magic tricks for his faith. In fact, he had less information than people have today. Today, the “Good News” has been proclaimed. The “mystery of the ages” has been revealed in Jesus Christ. Sins CAN be forgiven. Eternal life IS obtainable through Jesus Christ. How much greater should be the faith of a Christian today?

Verse 8 is a fitting conclusion. “Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing be upon Your people!” Like Jesus, Christians can face physical suffering and adversity, but nothing in this world can separate a Christian from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. Christians live in the world, and things will happen that will cause pain, sorrow, and anxiety. But life is NOT this world. Life is not things, position, or health. Life is the sanctified relationship that can exist with the Eternal God and Creator of the Universes through the love, courage and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Indeed, God’s blessings are upon His people!

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Showdown at Dairy Queen

Joey Prusak has probably seen all kinds. Though he is only 19 years old, he has worked for five years at the Dairy Queen in Hopkins, Minnesota. Customers come in all shapes and sizes, and some of them, Joey learned, come with few, if any, scruples.

A regular customer who is visually impaired pulled out a debit card recently to pay for his purchase. Unbeknownst to the customer, a \$20 bill fell out of his pocket onto the floor. A woman standing behind him in line picked up the bill and put it in her pocket, saying nothing and acting as if nothing had occurred.

He confronted the woman and asked her to return the money.

Joey saw what happened. He confronted the woman and asked her to return the money. When the lady denied taking the money, Joey asked her to leave the store. He then took \$20 of his own and gave to the visually impaired man.

Nothing would have been known of this incident had another customer not sent an email to the store manager, praising Joey for his actions. "It felt like the right thing to do," Joey told his manager. It was apparently an automatic reaction.

What is automatic for us? Taking advantage of a vulnerable individual ("finders keepers, losers weepers") or doing the right thing? Would we do as Joey did?

Paul recognized the standard God has set for all of us: "Providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians 8:21). The actions of that female customer at Dairy Queen were noticed that day, not only by Joey Prusak and perhaps others, but especially by God. She got away with nothing. And that's always the case; our actions are constantly monitored by the Lord.

Long ago the prophet Micah pondered what it would take to please the Lord. Would burnt offerings be sufficient? Would it take "...thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my

firstborn for my transgression...?" God's response was clear: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:7-8).

The Bible often speaks of God's expectation of us to do what is right toward others. Even though that wallet may have been dropped because its owner was irresponsible, does that give me the right to claim its contents as my own? We should know better.

"And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise" (Luke 6:31).

Tim Hall - "LightGrams"
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"I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me" (Psa. 3:5).

Before leaving these verses, it is appropriate to remember that no one knows when he goes to sleep, whether or not he shall ever awaken, and that only the blessing of God enables the sleeper to wake up. As a Medical doctor stated it, "No one ever draws his first breath without God's blessing; and it is also true of every other breath throughout life"! (*James Burton Coffman Commentary*)

God's Household

"Therefore remember that once you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'uncircumcision' by that which is called 'circumcision' (in the flesh, made by hands), that you were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off are made near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in his flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having killed the hostility through it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and to those who were near. For through him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:11-22 (World English Bible)

Division, pride, and jealousy, do we struggle with these today? At the time the apostle Paul wrote Ephesians, this was a real struggle as well.

Through Christ, walls of separation are destroyed. Divisions are reconciled, and peace is the result.

In the New Testament world of the first century, the world was divided among the Jews and everyone else (Gentiles). Pride, barriers, and walls were all built up between each other. However, in Christ, there is a different vision. A world divided is to be one.

Through Christ, walls of separation are destroyed. Divisions are reconciled, and peace is the result. In

Christ, no one is left outside. No one is a foreigner. No one is a stranger, but all are brought near to the Father. In Christ, there is one family, the household of God. His house is not built on the wisdom of the world but on the foundation of the apostles, Christ Himself fitting and holding each piece together.

Barriers are broken down, tensions eased, divisions destroyed; His household is one. God's family grows and is fitted together to become His dwelling place. A place where each of us is joined.

How about us? Are we being shaped, fitted together, growing to be His dwelling place? Are we being honed through His word so that we are one in Christ?

Steve Ellis
Pasadena, TX

"For myself, I long ago decided that I would rather know the truth than be happy in ignorance. If I can not have both truth and happiness, give me truth. We'll have a long time to be happy in heaven."

— A.W. Tozer, Man, The Dwelling Place Of God



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