

# Jesus Himself Is Our Peace

Ephesians 2:11-22

Key Verse: 2:14

**“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility....”**

In today's passage we find the words, “separate,” “excluded,” “foreigners and strangers,” and “hostility.” We understand these words. We have probably all been excluded in one way or another. Even in high school, social cliques marginalize outsiders based on nationality, color, social status, education, finances, and so on. Those who are excluded feel lonely, sorrowful and miserable. In the course of time, they become hostile and explode. This leads to denunciation and violent responses in a vicious cycle. Israelis and Arabs have been hostile for a long time. As America has supported Israel, we now see Arabs burning our flag and worse. Recently, tension between public school teachers and city administrators arose when teachers were excluded from important decisions. So we had a costly strike. Even in the church there is separation, division and hostility. It makes us question what is wrong with our world? What is wrong with our church? History tells us this is not new; it is a repeated story. How can we resolve conflicts and have peace? Everyone wants peace, and tries to have it, but nothing seems to work. Having peace seems to be our eternal homework. In this passage we learn what God has done for us through Christ. Jesus himself became our peace, by destroying barriers. Jesus created one new humanity. What does this mean to us? Let's consider this in light of Paul's teaching in Ephesians. In verses 11-12, he tells them to remember who they were. In verses 13-18, he explains what God has done through Christ. And in verses 19-22, he tells them who they are now.

## **First, remember who we were (11-12)**

Look at verses 11-12. **“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (which is done in the body by human hands) - remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”** The word “remember” is repeated two times in these verses. Paul wanted them to remember their status before they believed in Christ. During World War II, Americans used to say, “Remember Pearl Harbor!” Now, people say, “Remember 9-11!” This keeps us alert to danger and vigilant to resist enemies. Similarly, Paul uses “remember,” but to evoke a different response. He

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wants the Ephesians to remember their past exclusion so that they might be humble, thankful, and loving - not proud, critical, and divisive. Usually people do not want to remember their past miseries because it brings them pain and sorrow. So they say, "Don't talk about that," and try to suppress their memories. But we Christians need to remember our past misery in order to appreciate God's grace.

Then, what was their past condition? In verses 1-3, Paul had said that Gentile and Jew alike were dead in sin. In verses 11-12, he refers particularly to Gentiles. The Jews despised them as "the uncircumcised." Circumcision was a sign of being God's chosen people. The Gentiles were not chosen by God. In other words, they were abandoned by God. In the Talmud it is written, "God created the Gentiles in human form so that Jews would not be offended by their appearance when they used them as slaves." The Gentiles were also separated from Christ. In chapter 1 Paul told of the abundant blessings in Christ. In 2:5-6 Paul told how Christ made us alive and seated us with him in the heavenly realms. But those separate from Christ cannot have these blessings; they remain under curse. Furthermore, the Gentiles were excluded from citizenship in Israel. Romans 9:4-5 explain the benefits of this citizenship: adoption to sonship, the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises, the patriarchs - such as Abraham, Moses and David - and most of all, the Messiah. The Gentiles could not have a share in these benefits. Additionally, the Gentiles were foreigners to the covenants of the promise. There are many promises in the Bible. Among them, the covenants focus on the Messianic promises. These promises give us the meaning of life and purpose, and hope and vision for a fruitful future. With them, we can endure hardship, persevere in trials, and live a victorious life. But without these promises, we are easily crushed by the realities of life. Then we grope in the darkness without life direction, not knowing what we are doing. Finally, the Gentiles were without hope and without God in the world. Totally abandoned and lost, people conclude, "**Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die**" (1 Cor 15:32). Life is nothing more than the random pursuit of pleasure and everything ends in death. That was the condition of the Gentiles before knowing Christ. I am not just talking about the Gentiles; I am talking about us. We are Gentiles. This section describes our lives before Christ. We were separated, excluded, foreigners, without hope and without God. Let's remember who we were before knowing Christ.

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## Second, what God has done for us through Christ (13-18)

Just as the word “but” marks the end of bad news and beginning of good news in verse 4, so it does again in verse 13. Then Paul tells us in verses 13-18 what God has done for us Gentiles. In brief, through Jesus Christ God has brought us near to himself, made peace between Jewish and Gentile believers, and created one new humanity out of the two.

**First of all, God brought us near through the blood of Christ (13).** Let’s read verse 13. **“But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”** We often refer to relationships in spatial language. We say, “He seems very distant,” or “far away.” Here the words “were once far away” mean that we had no relationship with God. We had a “disconnect” with God, who is the source of life. But now we are connected with God through Christ Jesus. We can have an intimate relationship with God. This means a lot. We can receive God’s life, love, provision, and protection. We can pray to God and he hears and answers us. We can find wisdom in times of distress, strength in times of weakness, and have access to all of God’s blessings. How could this happen? It is “by the blood of Christ.” What separated us from God was not distance, but sin. Isaiah 59:2 says, **“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”** How can we solve this sin problem which separates us from God? God taught us in the Old Testament that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22). That is why the Jews offered many animal sacrifices. But they were just a shadow of things to come. They pointed to Jesus, who shed his blood on the cross for our sins. Jesus’ blood has power to break through the barrier of sin and bring us near to God. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple, which represented the barrier between God and man, was torn in two from top to bottom (Mt 27:51). Now we can come near to God through the blood of Jesus. This was not only a historical event, it has eternal power (Heb 9:14). We can come to God anytime, anywhere. Whenever we come to God, we need the blood of Jesus. Thanks to Jesus, who shed his blood to bring us to God!

**Secondly, God made peace between Jewish and Gentile believers through Jesus (14-15a).** After telling in verse 13 how Jesus restores our relationship with God, Paul explained in verses 14-18 how this affected the relationship of Jewish and Gentile believers. Verses 14-15a say, **“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of**

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**hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.”** God gave the law to help the Israelites recognize sin as sin and to train them in holiness (Ro 3:20). Jesus summed up the law with the word “love,” for God and for neighbors (Mk 12:37). But the Israelites did not practice the law with love. They became legalistic and self-righteous. They thought they were “clean” and the Gentiles were “unclean” like animals. So they excluded the Gentiles and despised them. In this way the law became a barrier and a dividing wall of hostility. Jesus destroyed this barrier by setting aside in his flesh the law. This means that through his death on the cross he abolished the ceremonial law with its commands and regulations. We don’t need to practice all kinds of ceremonies, such as keeping the Passover, the intricate Sabbath laws, or superficial hand-washing before eating. These practices had driven a sharp barrier between Jews and Gentiles. The dividing wall of hostility was so high and thick it seemed impenetrable. This barrier between Jew and Gentile represents all kinds of barriers between people. We can see so many barriers and dividing walls of hostility based on color, nationality, culture, financial and social status, education, and so on. These become the basis of pride that leads to contempt for others and division, even in the church. But Jesus destroys these barriers and dividing walls of hostility and brings peace.

At the Lausanne III conference in Cape Town, South Africa in 2010, the Christian Post interviewed Shadia Qubti, a Christian Palestinian Israeli from Nazareth, and Dan Sered, a Messianic Jew from Israel. They discussed how believers are helping to reconcile the opposing people groups in their region. Qubti works with Musalaha, an interdenominational initiative seeking to expand reconciliation between Christian Palestinians and Messianic Jews, while Sered directs Jews for Jesus in Israel. There are about 800 people a year, evenly divided between Palestinians and Israelis, who participate in Musalaha projects. Quotes from both of them follow:

**Qubti:** I believe in grassroots movements starting with smaller groups that come from the people. I believe as followers of Christ we have a lot of work to do. If we can establish unity among us, between Israelis and Palestinian Christians first, I think that will have a domino effect within our countries and regions. But first we have to try to get along together as a smaller community, as a prototype that this works. Christ is able to do what the world is not able to do. I think peace is possible in the Middle East and we need to be very proactive.

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**Sered:** I couldn't agree more. I think peace is not only possible in the Middle East, [but] I also believe it is inevitable. When Jesus returns there will be peace in the Middle East and all over the world. Right now, immediately, it is also possible. One by one as Israeli Jews and Arab Palestinians come to faith we are going to see more and more reconciliation and more and more peace. It is only because of the reconciling power of the gospel that we see that, through proclaiming the gospel, through working more and more towards an understanding of reconciliation between men. But first and foremost we must seek reconciliation between men and God and that only comes through faith in Jesus.

Indeed, Jesus breaks the barriers between people to bring peace. Usually, two hostile groups try to make peace through some kind of treaty with each other. But it is easily broken. Then people lose trust. But verse 14 says, **“For he himself is our peace...”** This means that Jesus is our peace. This peace does not come from a treaty, but a person. This reminds me of the story of the “Peace Child.” The people of Irian Jaya had been cannibals. Local tribes did not trust each other. Rather, they deceived each other through false friendships so they could betray and kill and eat each other. When Missionary Don Richardson presented the gospel to them, telling how Jesus was betrayed by Judas, they admired Judas' ability to betray Jesus. They thought Judas was the hero of the story and missed the point. It seemed impossible to explain the gospel to them. But Don found a way. They had a custom in which rival tribal leaders exchanged baby boys as pledges of trust. This became the basis for peace between tribes. It was very painful for the parents who gave their baby boys to the other tribe. One leader who had many children tried to give one of them to the enemy tribe. But as the child was being carried away, he ran after him and took him back. At that moment, another leader, who had only one baby son, offered his child instead. As he did so, the baby's mother collapsed out of anguish. Through this sacrifice there could be peace between the two tribes. Later, Don explained to the natives that God sent Jesus from heaven to his enemies on earth as a peace child. Then they understood the gospel. They accepted Jesus as their peace. They began to love one another, trust one another and worship God together. Jesus is our peace - the Prince of Peace. Here we learn how to have peace in the church. It is not just by honest discussion, but by coming to Jesus. Only in Jesus can we have true peace.

**Thirdly, God creates one new humanity in Christ (15b-18).** Verse 15 tells us God's purpose in sending Jesus as our peace. Look at verses 15b-16. **“His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which**

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**he put to death their hostility.”** God’s purpose extends beyond helping people to get along. God’s purpose was to create one new humanity in Christ. Here the words “create” and “one new” have great meaning. “Create” means the birth of a new life. It is not mere improvement, but a new creation. Jesus said **“You must be born again”** (Jn 3:7). This is not something man can do. But God can do this through the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:12-13). Here we see that God did not side with the Jews or with the Gentiles, but made a new humanity out of the two. This new humanity is one body in which the members are reconciled to God through the cross. Every part of the body is related to God through Jesus, and related to each other through Jesus. They have the same God, the same Lord, the same Spirit, the same faith, and the same hope. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ (Gal 3:28). Christ is the head of the church, and we are all members of his body. As the head governs the body, so Jesus governs the church. Jesus is not only the head of the church, but also its center. Each member must remain in Christ Jesus. We all come to God through the cross, which puts to death hostility caused by pride and self-righteousness. Now we can truly be one - one new humanity.

Verses 17-18 tell us how Jesus brought peace. They say, **“He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”** Jesus preached peace by his birth, words and actions, and finally through his death and resurrection. When Jesus was born, the angels sang, **“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests”** (Lk 2:14). Jesus proclaimed peace. In Matthew 5:9 Jesus said, **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”** When he sent his disciples out to preach, he told them, **“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house’”** (Lk 10:5). When he traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee, he had to go through Samaria, breaking the barrier between Samaritan and Jew (Jn 4:4). When Jesus died, he prayed, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”** (Lk 23:34a). It was to bring peace between God and man, and between man and man. Risen Jesus greeted his disciples, **“Peace be with you”** (Jn 20:26). This was eternal peace that Jesus brought by conquering the power of death. Through Jesus both Jew and Gentile, that is every kind of person, has access to the Father by one Spirit (18). In this way, we are united in Christ by one Spirit. This is amazing grace.

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## Third, who we are now (19-22)

In verses 19-22 Paul explains how Jesus, our peace, changes our identity. Look at verse 19. **“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household....”** In the past we were excluded, foreigners, and strangers. We were like illegal aliens who were treated with contempt and with no mercy. But now we are fellow citizens with God’s people. Wow! To be a fellow citizen is to enjoy the benefits and privileges of a nation or kingdom. We usually take for granted our privileges in the United States. But if we travel abroad and experience the poverty, disorder, and hardship, we deeply appreciate living in the USA. Yet the privilege of being a citizen of God’s kingdom is beyond comparison. God’s kingdom is holy, glorious, eternal, and infinite. We are citizens of God’s kingdom together with God’s people! We are also members of his household. God is our Father and all believers are members of his family, regardless of our human distinctions. We are brothers and sisters! Jesus is our Elder Brother (Ro 8:29). That is why we need to love one another, bear with one another, forgive one another, pray for one another, and encourage one another.

In verses 20-22, Paul uses the metaphor of a building to explain the church, which is the new community in Christ. Jesus himself is the chief cornerstone. The cornerstone is of crucial importance to a building. It is itself part of and essential to the foundation; it helps to hold the building steady and it also sets it and keeps it in line. The “apostles and prophets” indicate the inspired word of God. They point to Jesus and witness to Jesus. Their teaching is preserved in the Bible. This is the church’s foundational document; it is inviolable and cannot be added to, subtracted from, or modified by teachers who claim to be apostles or prophets today. Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures, is the sure, unchanging foundation of the church. In Christ, believers from all backgrounds are joined, and are being built together to become a holy temple in the Lord. This temple is not built of stones, bricks and precious metals like the Jerusalem Temple. This temple, which is the church, is made up of God’s people whom Jesus purchased with his blood. Jesus is the living Stone and God’s people are little living stones (1 Pe 2:4-5). This church is not finished yet; it is a work in progress. This church is largely unseen and huge. We call this the church universal. This church is the place where God lives by his Spirit. God is living, and this living God dwells among us. All members of his church should be aware of God’s presence.

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In today's passage we can find three metaphors which describe the church: body, household and building. If we understand the building as made of living stones, the common factor is that they are all organic. The church is not an organization, but an organism. The church is not static, but dynamic; it is growing. The church is not instituted by man, but by God. God dwells in his church and governs it, and works to make it grow. God built his church on Jesus, who is our peace. Someone may say this is a utopian dream, pointing out that we experience problems, divisions, and weaknesses. Someone may criticize God's church from a human point of view. But Paul saw God's vision and hope for the church. God is working to fulfill his hope and vision in spite of our weaknesses and mistakes. God works to discipline us, mold us, and unite us with this hope and vision. Let's look at God's people and church, not from a human point of view, but from God's point of view. Also, let's have God's hope and vision for the church.