
Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ... (Ephesians 3:8)

From Outsiders to Insiders – Reconciled (Part 2)

Ephesians 2:13-18

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 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, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. 17 AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

One of the most devastating effects of sin is that it separates. Sin's sinister ploy is to separate people from that which is good, healthy and godly. We see this in the Garden. After Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit, defying God's command, thinking that somehow God had withheld something good from them, what happened? Because of their sin, they were separated from God. They hid themselves in the Garden from God's presence. And, once God "found" them; even then we see the roots of sin separating not only man from God, but also man from humanity as Adam blames both God and the woman for his actions.

This condition of being separated from God would continue through the ages with man's heart becoming increasingly "at odds" with or in enmity against God and His ways. This enmity and separation would extend to the human race. And think about it like this, what started off as just "one race" – the human race, would unravel. Because of sin, we find in Genesis 11 that this "one race" set out to do what Adam and Eve had done, to defy God's command to fill and have dominion over the earth. They congregated at a place called Shinar and intended to build a tower to heaven rather than obey God and take dominion of the earth. So God confused their languages there and scattered them across the earth so that humanity would fulfill His command.

With the introduction of languages came misunderstanding and confusion. Before we blame God for this, for He is the one that confused the languages, remember that all of this was the result of man's sin; man's refusal to obey God; to do things God's way. Adam and Eve thought they had a better way of doing things. The crowd at Shinar thought they had come up with a better plan than God's. So, once again, we see that sin separates. Adam and Eve's relationship was changed by sin. Cain and Abel's relationship was changed by sin. This conglomeration of people at Shinar; their relationships were changed by sin. And the events of Genesis 11 would further separate humanity. Not only was man separated from God, but now increasingly men would be separated from one another. Thus, the "races" of men were born and as groups of men isolated themselves, they would grow to mistrust and fear one another.

In the midst of all this, God calls out one man, Abraham, to be the father of called out race, one that would have the responsibility to show the rest of the races the truth about God. It would be through the descendants of Abraham that one would come who would be the blessing on all nations. This would be Jesus Christ. But before Jesus came, the descendants of Abraham, through Isaac, would become prideful of themselves and hateful of the other "races" of men. The other races of men would not take kindly to the "holier-than-thou" attitude of this race called Hebrews or Jews and result in animosity, enmity and hostilities of all kinds. We see enmity between the Jews and a Pharaoh that did not know Joseph and who treated God's people terribly. We see enmity between the people of God and the Canaanites who worshipped false Gods and did godless acts. We see enmity between the people of God the Philistines, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and the Romans.

By the time of Christ, the Jews only acknowledged two kinds of people in the world; Jews and non-Jews; or Jews and Gentiles. But remember, Christ was promised and Christ had come. And what had Christ come to do? The easy answer is that Christ came into the world to save sinners. Jesus came to

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redeem, not just the race from which He was born, but all "races" of men from sin. Thus, John the Baptist exclaimed in John 1:29, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the *world*." Not just the sins of Jews, but of all who would believe upon Him.

But Jesus did not just come to deal the death blow to the sin that separated people from God. By extension, the death of Christ also dealt the death blow to the sin that separated people from people. What sin had torn asunder in Genesis 3, the unity of the human race; Christ had come to restore. In other words, Christ came not only to reconcile the relationship between the Holy God and sinful men; but also to reconcile the relationship between sinful men to one another.

Beloved, this is in part what it means to be a Christian. To be a Christians is to be reconciled to God and reconciled to the people of God, the holy nation, the chosen race of which Peter speaks of in 1 Peter 2:9. Let me remind you that reconciliation means *"to fully experience the peace and presence of someone with whom you formally had hostility."* To be a Christian is to be at peace. We read in Romans 5:1 that because we have "been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...: and here in our Ephesians 2 text, we learn that this peace or reconciliation with God is experienced as the "races" of men that had come into being because of sin, would now be one new race, one new body, one new man because of the Savior. For those "in Christ" – for those in the Church, race is no longer to be an issue because we are now one race; God's chosen people. But be warned; whether outside the church or inside the church; any group of people that seeks peace among the "races" apart from the Prince of Peace will always come up short; and in fact, will often do more harm than good. The past six and one half years in the United States is evident of that. A president that promised to promote racial harmony has done more to divide the "races" than unite them. Racial tensions are higher than ever in our country. Why? Because without the principles, the practice and truly the presence of Christ and His ways, racial harmony is simply a "dream."

This brings us back to our text. Last week, we looked at Ephesians 2:13-18 seeking to understand the why's and how's of this biblical doctrine we call reconciliation. Paul, fearful of what would happen in the early church now being made up of Jews and Gentles, if these two groups did not come to rightly understand that being a peace with God also means being at peace with all people, most especially Christians, addresses this matter of reconciliation.

Let me remind you that reconciliation means – *"to fully experience the peace and presence of someone with whom you formally had hostility."* The Greek word as found down in verse 16 speaks of being changed from a condition animosity and hostility to a condition where all animosity and hostility is removed, ensuring that there is absolutely NO impediment to unity and peace between the parties involved.

Reconciliation is NOT neutrality – it does no leave a person in a state of apathy or indifference. Reconciliation is NOT tolerance – it is not putting up with someone because you have to even though you do not want to. Rather, reconciliation is peace; peace with, peace in, and total access to the presence and blessings of God. And when a person has experienced this kind of relationship with God, he or she will extend it to others.

Last week we looked at the first of two concerns Paul has; first, in verses 13-15, having a reconciled relationship with all those who are "in Christ" regardless of their racial or ethnic background, followed by verses 16-18 where Paul lays out the reason why this is so, the reason by which we can be reconciled to one another by explaining the reconciliation of these groups of people to God in verses 16-18.

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I. Reconciliation with One Another – “In Christ” (2:13-15)

Under this point, we have already considered two thoughts:

A. Why reconciliation among people is needed.

We noted that the root of all racial and ethical prejudice is simply “pride” – thinking that somehow, some way, one’s own racial or ethnic background is somehow superior or somehow deserves better. We forget that we are all sinners deserving of God’s wrath and we also forget that humanity itself, regardless of color, race, or even its depth of practice of the depravity of sin is yet all created in the image of God. Any pride that I might feel ought to be in God who so wondrously created man in His own image.

When we forget this, when self-pride or national pride take priority over boasting in the LORD for creating humanity in His image, relationships will break down. And so, we need reconciliation due to our prideful, self-absorbed, self-centered ways.

B. Where true reconciliation is found.

Next, we noted where true reconciliation is to be found. In verse 14 we read, *“For He Himself is our peace...”* (2:14). Here we find that Christ Himself is the only source of peace between those who have been hostile towards one another. In light of racial, religious and even raucous divisions that lead to hostilities, Christ is the only source of true and lasting peace among people. *“...He Himself is our peace...”* If you are experiencing tensions and conflicts in your home, make sure that it is not because YOU have never surrendered to the Prince of Peace.

Let me remind you that Christ is peace; not animosity. Christ is peace with the presence and practice of God, not stubbornness to your own will. Christ is peace; not heated argument. I love how Paul puts it in Romans 12:18, *if possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.* Peter puts it this way in 1 Peter 3:11, *“...SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT...”* Do you seek peace; diligently seek it out in any given situation? This is what it means to be “in Christ.” Peace and the constant pursuit of reconciliation with others is what Christians do. Yes, our sinful flesh will be drawn to conflict, even with brothers and sisters in Christ. So what must you do? You must ask yourself, “Is the Prince of Peace truly reigning as Lord of my life; or am I on the throne?” How do you know who is reigning? Are you pursuing peace with others or are you the source of conflict? To the degree that Jesus is truly living out His life through you and His life through me; we will experience peace. Why? Because Jesus does not fight against Himself. One of the genuine indicators of conversion to Christ is seen as those who formerly were deeply hostile towards one another begin to pursue peace with one another. At the source of this new peace is that Christ has come to dwell in each heart, subduing our selfishness and pride. This brings us to how Paul explains the way Christ established this new peace between the Jews and Gentiles, thus providing us an example of how to experience peace within the church.

C. How reconciliation is realized.

15 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...

In verse 15 we are given the answer to the question of “how” reconciliation among people is realized. The answer will not please the secularist or the sociologists, or the politicians or the non-religious. But very clearly the Word of God says that enmity between people is abolished “in His flesh” – that is on the cross of Christ, whereby He “made” out of two opposing groups, one “new man” that is – the Church.

Verse 15 tells us that it is Jesus Christ who broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, which created racial hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles. We are told that the source of this their hostility was *“the Law of commandments contained in ordinances.”* The word *“abolishing”* means “nullifying” or

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“rendering inoperative.” ***“In His flesh”*** points to Christ’s death on the cross. Paul goes on to say in verse 16 that through the cross, Christ put to death the enmity.

How does the Old Testament Law bring about racial and ethnic tensions? We need to remember that God gave the Law to Israel in order to demonstrate the impossibility of sinners earning a right standing before God through the keeping of the Law. Man cannot reconcile himself to God by anything man does (Galatians 3:19-24). In fact, the revealed that all people are shut out of the presence and peace of God because of their sin. God’s holy law created a barrier between sinners and God.

But initially, the law was given only to Israel as God’s covenant people. There were many stipulations in the law that excluded Gentiles from the Jewish forms of worship. Only priests of Jewish descent could perform the sacrifices and ceremonies. Only ethnic Jews who had undergone the proper cleansing rituals could approach the altar with their sacrifices. So the law created a barrier not only between sinners and God, but also between the Jews and the Gentiles.

But through the cross, Christ fulfilled the law, completed the Law and thereby nullified or abolished the old covenant law. Jesus then inaugurated the new covenant in His blood, which puts His holy law into the hearts of every believer (Hebrews 8:6-13). So, when Paul wrote that because Christ bore the curse of the law on the cross in Galatians 3:14, so, ***“in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”*** So through the cross, Christ established the basis for peace between sinners and the holy God; for peace between the Jews and the Gentiles; for peace between all men. But this is only available and fully realized if you are “in Christ.” If you, by faith, have received Christ as Lord and Savior. This is what Paul meant when he wrote Galatians 3:28 saying, ***“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.”***

But there is more, for not only did Christ break down the dividing wall; but Christ, by means of His cross, also brought peace and reconciliation to people by creating the one new man, the church. The Greek word translated ***“make”*** in verse 15 more literally means “create.” What Adam and Eve damaged because of sin in the original creation, Christ is recovering through the new man – the Church is the ***“new man”*** – we are Christ’s new creation. The Jews considered that there were only two kinds of people on the face of the earth, “Jews and Gentiles.” Paul instructs his readers that there is a third and better group, for the Church is a new humanity. In the words of 1 Peter 2:9, we are a ***“chosen race”*** and a ***“holy nation.”***

Let me make a couple of practical applications. First, apart from a language barrier, there is no biblical reason for dividing the church along racial or ethnic lines. Our church ought to be a reflection of the ethnic diversity of our community. By being multi-racial and multi-cultural, the church is to demonstrate to the world this one new man, which Christ created through the cross.

A second application I wish to make is this; that in light of what Christ has done for us on the cross, the first places where we are to be experiencing the peace and intimate presence of one another is in the church and in the family. What are you doing to experience the peace of God in such places? What are you doing to rob yourself, your family, or your church of such a peace? The believer is to be striving for peace; which means you have peace with God because you cannot have true peace with others without peace with God. Do you have peace with God because of faith in Christ and if so, is this peace being lived out by you in your relationships with others. If not, repent, come to Christ and ask for the grace to experience His peace and to live out His peace. Be reconciled to God so that you can be reconciled to others!

II. Reconciliation with God – “through the Cross” (2:16-18)

16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. 17 AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

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Let us consider three things here that are clearly the result of the cross of Christ:

A. Through the cross, Christ reconciled believers into one body to God (2:16)

Verses 15 and 16 are very much related only Paul moves his readers from the idea of reconciliation with one another to our reconciliation with God. Notice verse 16, "through the cross" – because of what Christ did, dying on the cross for our sins, being our sin sacrifice; it was through this cross that Christ brought together Jews and Gentiles into one body, into the one new man.

The cross serves as the means by which Jesus reconciled this one body to God through the cross. We are told that the cross out to death the enmity. Interesting, isn't it; that the One who was slain on the cross Himself has slain the enmity. What is enmity? It is hostility, animosity, hatred. Whose enmity has been slain by means of the cross? God's wrath against man? To be sure, the cross has done this, but it would also appear to mean that any animosity or hostility that exists between the "races"; be it Jews and Gentiles, black and white, or any other combination, has been put to death "in Christ."

For the Jews, the law stood as the great separator between themselves and the other nations. They prided themselves on having God's law and ordinances, even if it was something they could not keep. This set up tensions between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews thought they were better because they had the Law; the Gentiles thought they were better because they did not. What both groups failed to recognize was that the law condemned Jew and Gentile alike, because it clearly proves that we all have sinned against God. Whereas the Jews like to separate people into two races, Jews and Gentiles, whereas our tendency today is separate people on racial lines; God's law says there are but two kinds of people; law-breakers and law-keepers. Oh, wait, really there is just one kind of people in God's eyes, law breakers. All of have sinned and fall short of His glory (Romans 3:23). And so, God the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, who perfectly kept God's law, not only externally, but also on the heart level. What did the Father say of His Son in Matthew 3:17, "***This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.***" Because Jesus satisfied the righteous demands of God's law through the cross, through His death that paid our penalty, God offers complete reconciliation and peace to everyone who trusts in Jesus. This is a peace to be experienced by everyone who believes in Christ! As Paul put it in Romans 5:1, "***Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.***" We learn something important here. The basis for being reconciled to God – of having peace with God, is not upon anything that you do, but only by believing that what Jesus did on the cross, He did for you. By this faith, "we" are brought to God, into this one body, the church, and we are to experience and practice the peace of God among one another. Through the cross, Christ reconciled us to God and to one another.

B. Through the cross, Christ preached "peace" to all people (2:17).

In verse 17, Paul quotes from Isaiah 57:19, "***And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near.***" By "***you who were far away,***" Paul was speaking of the Gentiles. They were the strangers to the covenants of the promise (v. 12). The gospel of Jesus preaches or proclaims that peace with God is available through Christ. But Christ also preached "***peace to those who were near***" - referring to the Jews. Here is the point, while sin separates us from God and from others; sin is also the great and deadly unifier, condemning all people to the deserving of God's wrath. Enter in – Jesus Christ – sin separates us from God and one another, this Savior separates us from sin and unifies with God and with one another. This is the peace of Christ.

One of the application we need to make from verse 17 is this; it is not only the non-religious (pictured by the Gentiles) who need to hear the gospel of peace with God through the blood of Christ, it is also the religious people (pictured by the Jews), those who know about the covenants of God's promise of salvation, who know all the bible stories, who can quote John 3:16 and the like, even these need to hear the good news. Beloved, religion, the adherence to a particular tradition of worship, even the most

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biblically based, cannot save anyone. Paul himself reveals this in Philippians 3:5-6, outlining all of his religious credentials, being ***“circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”*** Impressive list, right? Some of you might have your own similar religious pedigree. But if we keep reading in verse 7, what do we see? Paul says, ***“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.”*** He goes in verse 9 on to state unequivocally that he did not stand before God in a righteousness of his own derived from the Law, but rather through the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ (3:9).

Peace with God never comes on the basis of what we have done! If you think that you can get into heaven because of your religion, because of your good works, because you come from a Christian family, you are grossly mistaken. Peace with God and ultimate peace with others comes only through the cross of Jesus Christ. And so, the peace of Christ is to be preached to all people. And finally...

C. Through the cross, Christ gave believers access in one Spirit to the Father (2:18)

If we are not careful, we might easily miss something significant from verse 18. What is it? Notice that it is “Trinitarian”. Follow along with me in verse 18, ***for through Him [God the Son] we both have our access in one Spirit [God the Spirit] to the Father [God the Father]***. Why does Paul write this way? Paul intentionally points to the Trinity because it perfectly demonstrates the harmony and unity that we are to strive for in the church. To be sure, we do not fully understand the mystery of the Tri-unity of God. But we do know this, that the Bible teaches us there is but one God who eternally exists in three eternal, each of whom is fully God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are each distinct persons and yet they are not three gods, but one God. And this one God has enjoyed perfect fellowship and love between the three persons from eternity. And now, through Christ, we are being called into the presence and practice of that peaceful fellowship.

In verse 18 we read ***“for through Him [Christ], we both [Jew and Gentile] have our access in one Spirit to the Father.”*** This is the heart of the gospel, that through Christ, because of Christ, His work on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven and His sending of the Holy Spirit; because of all this we now have access to God, whom Paul here calls, “the Father.” Christianity is not a religion of rituals and practices. It is a living, personal relationship with God the Father through the efforts of Jesus Christ by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The word ***“access”*** speaks of a formal introduction to a dignitary. In the days of monarchies, a commoner would be formally introduced to the king through one of the king's representative. When I first met Joh MacArthur, it wasn't at one of the Shepherd's Conferences I attended. I sat at times just a few rows behind him, but after the service, he was swarmed by a number of men, and well, that is just not my thing. But one time, while attending a conference at Countryside Bible Church in Texas where MacArthur was speaking, I knew one of the pastors of the church and he gave me access, introduced me to MacArthur. This is what Jesus has done for us on a much larger scale. He has given us access and introduction to the God of the universe, who, because of the cross of Christ, has also become our Father! What an indescribable privilege, to be able to come into the presence of the Father, through the Son, because of the indwelling presence of Holy Spirit! Whether Jew or Gentile, the way into God's presence is the same: it is through the cross of Christ.

As I close, let me make a couple of application. The first one is salvific. Let me ask you, *do you have a personal relationship with the Father because you have trusted in the death of His Son Jesus as being in your place and sufficient to pay for all of your sins?* The only way to know peace and reconciliation with the holy God is to be justified, declared right with God, by faith, by trusting that Jesus did this for you. The work of your hands will never gain you access to the holy God. Religious rituals can

Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

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never reconcile you to Him. Only the cross, where Jesus reconciled sinners to God, only this gains access into heaven. Make sure your trust is in Christ alone!

The second application is but a reminder of what we considered last week. For if we are right with God, experiencing peace with God, then we must be *pursuing peace with our fellow believers*. Are you experiencing such peace? This includes members of your family. It includes the people in this church. Do you have a strained relationship with another believer? Then, as far as it depends upon you, strive for peace (Romans 12:18). For if that other person and you have been reconciled to God through faith in Christ, then you must do all that you can to be reconciled to him. Why? Because it becomes a testimony of ability of the cross to take those who had been at odds with one another to be in harmonious fellowship with one another. This is what the world needs to see. May they see it through us who believe!

Soli Deo Gloria

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