War and Peace

Text: Ephesians 2:14-19

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**Scriptures:** Leviticus 14:1-8; Ephesians 2:11-22

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 122, 119:33-40, 487, 390, 368

Series: Ephesians (Sermon #11)

Theme: Christ and His work have brought peace both between God and all the members of his household providing access to God the Father for both Jews and Gentiles.

Proposition: Brothers and sisters, Christ Himself is our peace both with God and with one another.

**Introduction**

What were the first words which Jesus spoke to his gathered disciples after He had risen from the dead on the first day of the week in a room where they had fearfully met behind locked doors? They are recorded by gospel writer John “*Peace be with you*” (John 20:19). After showing His hands and His side to the disciples, again Jesus said to them with the words “*Peace be with you*” (John 20:21).

This was, and still is, a commonly used greeting amongst Jews ‘Shalom Aleichem’. Yet here, on the lips of the resurrected Lord Jesus, the word ‘peace’ is filled with fuller meaning than ever before. In His common greeting, Jesus conveyed uncommon grace. These gathered disciples who had all abandoned Christ at the time of his arrest received not a justified rebuke, but instead, a most precious gift: the peace of Christ.

He had spoken of this gift before He willingly went to His death on the cross, saying to His disciples then: “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid*” (John 14:27). This peace is so much more than the absence of war, it is ‘a state of untroubled, undisturbed well-being’.

The Greek word used, both by Christ as He addressed his disciples before and after His death and in our text, is the equivalent of the Hebrew word ‘Shalom’. The rich meaning of this word has been summed up this way “*everything which makes for mankind’s highest good*”. We are going to see from the Scripture today, brothers and sisters in the Lord, that Christ Himself is our peace both with God and with one another in our second point “Unity and peace”. Before we do that, we look at the opposite of peace in our 1st point.

1. **Division and Hostility**

As many of you know, I grew up in the North East of England. There was a high long brick wall which separated our garden and orchard from our neighbour’s section. It was a formidable barrier which was too tall to see over. As a result, we had no contact with our neighbours when we were in the garden – except perhaps to throw a ball back over from time to time hoping it would land safely on the other side which we couldn’t see. Further north there were the ancient remains of ‘Hadrian’s Wall’. This was a line of defence constructed during the reign of the Roman emperor Hadrian. Whilst this large stone wall was certainly a visible expression of Roman power, and helped to control immigration and stop smuggling it also separated the ‘barbarians’ to the north from Roman Britain to the south.

You don’t need to grow up in England to know that walls are barriers designed to keep people apart. The Berlin Wall was a formidable physical and ideological barrier between the west and east of that German city from 1961 to 1989. Today the ‘Trump wall’ is widely known as a barrier between Mexico and the USA. It too is both a physical and an ideological separtor – representing more protectionist/isolationist federal policies.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians (around 60-62 AD) there was a widely known physical and ideological barrier within the Jerusalem Temple. This is very likely what Paul refers to when he writes about the ‘dividing wall of hostility’ in verse 14. This wall separated Gentiles and Jews within the temple area. The Gentiles (non-Jews) were excluded from the inner court where sacrifices for sin were offered. {In Acts 21:27-36 we read that Paul was charged with aiding and abetting illegal entry by a Gentile Christian through the temple barrier}.

The division between Jews and Gentiles was far more extensive than the physical wall within the temple, it was embodied in theMosaic Law with its detailed holiness code which made it impossible for faithful Jews to live in close proximity with Gentiles. We read a small portion of this set of laws from Deuteronomy: 14:1-8 regarding dietary restrictions. This is one of the many regulations which God set in place for His covenant people Israel in the Old Testament and which Paul refers to as ‘*the law of commandments and ordinances*’ in verse 15. Other required practices which separated Jews from non-Jews were the circumcision of males and other dietary restrictions.

A document written by Aristeas around 100BC, states that ‘*the legislator (Moses) surrounded us with unbroken palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter, being thus kept pure in body and soul…worshipping the one almighty God’. ‘Therefore so that we should be polluted by none nor be infected with perversions by associating with worthless persons, he has hedged us about on all sides with prescribed purifications in matters of food and drink and touch and hearing and sight*’.

Paul writes of the ‘dividing wall of hostility’ between Jews and Gentiles. The Greek word translated ‘hostility’ in verse 14 expresses a deep-rooted hatred often expressed in aggressive attacks. The Jews prided themselves on being God’s people who possessed the law; irrespective of whether or not they honoured that law. They tended to despise all who were outside the commonwealth of Israel and to think of themselves as a superior race. The Jews were generally hostile to the Gentiles.

The Greeks had a great heritage of philosophy. They were proud of their learned heroes like Plato, Socrates and Aristotle. They generally saw the Jews as uneducated barbarians. The Gentiles were generally hostile to the Jews.

The same word ‘hostility’ in verse 16 refers to the natural condition of all mankind (both Jews and Gentiles) as ‘God-haters’. Those who ‘*by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*’ (Rom 1:18). All who deny the reality of the Living God, despite His eternal power and divine nature being evident in this world which He has created (Rom 1:20) are hostile to their Maker and are ‘children of wrath’ (Eph 2:3) as Paul has already expressed in this letter to the Ephesians.

Whilst there was a ‘dividing wall of hostility’ between the Jewish and Gentile Christians before they came to Christ, there was an even greater division between them all and God Himself. Our text speaks of both ‘horizontal’ hostility between people and ‘vertical’ hostility between them all and God. This is not news to us we can see it clearly today in the hostility of many towards God, and the tensions and wars between nations, the antagonism between different ethnic groups, the breakup of marriages, brokenness in families and conflict in churches.

Take a moment, pause and honestly ask yourself this question: is there a ‘dividing wall’ between me and God? Is there sin in my life which I need to confess to Him? Am I angry or disappointed with God because he has not ‘delivered’ the particular circumstances in my life that I had hoped for? If there is, you must come to Christ in repentance and faith because He alone is our peace. Draw near to the Saviour today. He will not keep you at a distance.

Brother and sister in Christ, pause and honestly ask yourself this question: Is there a ‘dividing wall’ between me and another believer? If there is, or might be, you are called by God to go to your brother or sister and ‘be reconciled’ (Matt 5:24). Seeking the forgiveness of someone you have wronged requires great humility, coming to Christ who is gentle and humble of heart gives strength and resolve to seek to make peace with others as much as it depends on ourselves.

We all need Christ to remove both the horizontal and vertical walls in our lives. He alone is our peace – which brings us to our second point:

1. **Unity and Peace**

Whilst the demolition of the Berlin Wall (which started on 9th November 1989) took place over an extended period of time involving both local citizens and border guards, the removal of the ‘dividing wall of hostility’ was completed as Christ submitted Himself to be executed on a cross at Calvary. Paul writes in verses 14 and 15: “*For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace*”. The source and content of true peace is Christ Jesus alone. He is the ‘Prince of Peace’ (Isaiah 9:6).

On the cross He endured the hostility of people who ‘wagged their heads’ (Matt 27:39), mocked (27:41) and reviled (27:44) Him. There He suffered under the full weight of God’s perfectly righteous anger against Himself; God the Father having made Him who knew no sin to be sin. Placing upon His truly innocent Son all the sins of all of the people He saves. Christ did not remove God’s perfect law; He had fulfilled it entirely (Matt 5:17). However, He did abolish all the Old Testament laws which separated Jews from Gentiles. There on that lonely, cruel cross a war was fought unto death. Christ died, but the grave could not hold Him. He won the greatest war, conquering sin and death. He won this war so that there would be abiding peace amongst all God’s people.

Did you know that in the first century AD, Christians were called ‘the third race’, or the ‘new race’? They were neither Jew nor Greek. The division was gone! Christ won the war to create a new humanity – a new race. Brothers and sisters in our Lord, by God’s grace we are all part of this new humanity and there is a call on each of our lives to live as the new people we have been created to be in Christ. Later in this letter, in light of the gospel, the Apostle Paul will write: “*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (4:1-3).

We are to be peacemakers with one another, because we belong body and soul to the One who Himself is our peace. This truth is expressed in Scripture in a variety of ways for example: “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all*” (Rom 12:18); “*And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace*” (James 3:18); “*So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding*” (Rom 14:19). Is there someone you need to go to this week and seek to make peace so that you can be reconciled to them? Peace is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). In the life of a believer it is evidence that Christ is Lord of your life.

Through His completed work at the cross, Christ reconciled all those for whom He died (both Jews and Gentiles) to God. Paul expresses this truth in verse 16. The Greek word translated ‘reconcile’ pictures a total, complete, full restoration of a relationship. Imagine two former friends who have fallen out. They are now enemies, estranged from one another. Reconciliation changes this division and hostility to unity and peace. The enemies become friends. Richard III in Shakespeare’s play of the same name expressed it this way “*I desire to reconcile me to his friendly peace*.” Christ has reconciled all God’s people to His ‘friendly peace’. This is why all who are belong to Christ have open access to God the Father.

Both Jewish and Gentile believers become members of the household of God when they pray “Our Father…” they evidence the reality that they are indwelt by the same Spirit of God. This is true unity. As Paul will express it in chapter 4 of this letter: “*One body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all*” (Eph 4:4-6).

Let me ask you a question. Who would you say is the most powerful, engaging, authoritative preacher of all time? The answer is Jesus Christ who came and ‘*preached the good news of the Kingdom of God*’ (Luke 4:43). He fulfilled the prophesy of Isaiah (57:19) “*Peace, peace, to the far and to the near," says the LORD, "and I will heal him*”. He ‘preached peace’ to both Jews and Gentiles and continues to do so through the members of His Body, the church. That’s people like you and me!

Later in this letter, in chapter six, Paul will write about putting on the ‘armour of God’, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit and also the right footwear! Can you remember what that is? ‘…*shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace*’ (Eph 6:15). Have you got your ‘gospel of peace’ shoes on today? When we are ready to proclaim the gospel of peace, both in our words and deeds, then we are following Christ, the Master Preacher. This is the means that the Lord has given to create unity and peace in marriages, families, churches and nations where before there was division and hostility.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, know that Christ Himself is our peace both with God and with one another.

AMEN