

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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### CHRIST JESUS: THE GREAT PEACEMAKER

**Y**ou will often hear people quote the Bible to support their particular position on some civil or political issue. Christianity has suffered a great deal from this type of abuse, and perhaps on no subject more than the subject of “peace”. The common understanding of this term centers around two points; one, men desire peace in a world full of hostility; that is, people want to see war and bloodshed abolished; and two, men want peace of mind, a subjective disposition of calm and well-being. The trouble (very literally) is that sinful man can never possess peace, either outwardly or inwardly. He may convince himself in one way or another that he is at peace and has peace of mind, but apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is a Satanic delusion. Our understanding of peace is basically Greek. The Greek understanding of peace (EIRENE) was primarily negative, the mere absence of turbulence or conflict. The Hebraic sense is rooted in the word SHALOM. When the Jewish writers used the word EIRENE, they impregnated it with SHALOM, which understood peace more in a positive sense; not merely the absence of strife but the additional element of well being, harmony and totality. The Pauline sense is even more emphatic. Peace is the result of a restored relationship where the wrath of God has been dealt with in Christ (cf. Rom. 5:1ff). EIRENE is found over ninety times in the New Testament, almost half (forty-three times) of these in the letters of Paul. It is therefore an important concept in Paul’s thinking, as our text will go on to show. In this section of the epistle the Apostle Paul is still seeking to communicate the “incomparably great power for us who believe” (1:19). The knowledge of that power is made known only by the Holy Spirit (1:17). It is illustrated by the resurrection of Christ and demonstrated in the lives of those who were dead in sin (2:1). It is solely by grace (2:8). It is extended to those who at one time were completely cut off from God’s covenant dealings (2:11-13). “The Gentiles suffered five-fold alienation. They were Christless (aliens to the Messiah) – “remember that at that time you were separate from Christ.” They were not part of the Messianic people (cf. Romans 9:5). They had no thought or hope of a Messiah. They were stateless (alien to God’s nation) – “excluded from citizenship in Israel.” Israel was a nation under God, a theocracy, but the Gentiles had no part or franchise in this. They were friendless (alien to the covenants) – “and foreigners to the covenants of the promise.” God had bound himself unconditionally to bring blessing upon and through Israel. But the Gentiles had no such promise. (Cf. Genesis 12:2ff.; 13:14ff.; 15:1ff.; 17:1ff.; and 22:15ff.) They were hopeless and godless (alien to hope and to God) – “without hope and without God in the world.” The pagan world was religious in everything. There were temples and statues everywhere. Similarly, look at the great world religions today. Can the Scriptures be right – is the pagan world then and now godless? Yes, because false gods are nothing, and religious ceremonies are nothing without the true God. The Christian Church needs to believe its own Scriptures (cf. Romans 3:11). The Gentiles were indeed without hope and without God.”<sup>1</sup> God has done something in Christ. His purposes center on the Church, composed of Jew and Gentile. However, the Apostle is not content to let the matter rest there; he must unfold how God accomplished this fact. He has done something entirely new.

#### I. THE SOURCE OF PEACE: THE PACE-MAKER (v. 14a)

“For he himself is our peace.” The Greek text puts the pronoun HE in the emphatic

position. The conjunction connects the verse with what has just preceded it (v. 13). PEACE has the article (E EIRENE). The article used with the predicate noun presents the predicate as something well known, or as that which alone merits the designation; i.e., the only thing to be considered. Christ is THE PEACE. He is the “Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). He promises HIS PEACE to His own (Jn. 14:27; 16:33). Angels sang at His birth, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth PEACE among men with whom he is pleased (Lk. 2:14). Our peace with God comes at His expense (Isa. 53:5; Rom. 5:1ff). Because of Jesus Christ, God is *The God of Peace* (Rom. 15:33, 16:20; I Cor. 14:33; II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; I Th. 5:23; II Th. 3:16; Heb. 13:20, 21).

## II. **THE WORK OF THE PEACE-MAKER (v. 14b-16)**

There was an obstacle to peace. First and foremost, it was man’s enmity and hostility to God and God’s judicial wrath against sinners. This had to be dealt with first. Also, the purpose of God entailed uniting Jew and Gentile as one in the Body of Christ, the Church; this necessitated removing another obstacle.

A. THE DIVIDING WALL OF HOSTILITY – What is meant by this? Some commentators have suggested that it refers to the barrier which separated the inner courts of the Jerusalem temple from the court of the Gentiles (cf. Acts 21:27ff). Other restrictions were placed upon Jewish women and laymen right up to the High Priest, who alone could enter the holy of holies on the day of the atonement. This picture may be in the background, but surely the foremost thought is that personal hatred and hostility which existed between the groups. The bond of unity between the two is Christ. He is what they have in common. How is this accomplished? How was this peace made? Paul tells us first negatively and then positively:

1. **NEGATIVELY – CHRIST ABOLISHED (Gk. KATARGESAS, to make null and/or void) THE LAW (Note: TON NOMON) WITH ITS COMMANDMENTS AND REGULATIONS.** The law is a unit. Paul is not speaking simply of the ceremonial law. Men are not justified by the law (Gal. 3:19-4:5). But, on the other hand, the holy law of God is NOT abrogated by the law of faith (Rom. 3:31, 7:22, 13:8-10). To what, then, is Paul referring? The context has direct references to Jew and Gentile. The law created a division between the two (cf. 1 Kings 8:53; Deut. 33:3-4). Christ made void the divisive function of the law. The law was not given to Israel as a means of either justification or sanctification. It served to make a distinction between the Jew and Gentile and was identified with the external “ordinances”. The abolishing took place IN HIS FLESH; that is, by the agency of the Messiah’s death.
2. **POSITIVELY – CHRIST CREATED IN HIMSELF ONE NEW MAN OUT OF THE TWO.** The word for NEW is KAINOS. There are two words in Greek for “new”; NEOS, which means new in reference to time, and KAINOS, which means “new in quality, new in character, unfamiliar, fresh, introducing something which has not been there before and which could not even have been there before”.<sup>2</sup> The point is that Christ “creates” a new man. He does not turn a Jew into a Gentile or a Gentile into a Jew. Peace is made in the new man, in Christ – nowhere else.

B. THE MEANS BY WHICH CHRIST WROUGHT PEACE – THROUGH THE CROSS (Gk. DIA TOU STAUROU, lit. by means of the cross). The cross reconciles man to God and man to man. Christ has PUT TO DEATH (Gk. APOKTEINAS, aorist participle, used to express means) THEIR HOSTILITY. This is done by the death of Christ in His physical body and He unites Jew and Gentile in ONE BODY, which is the Church. The price of peace, both with God and between men, was the blood of Christ.

### **III. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE PEACE-MAKER (v. 17)**

This does not primarily refer to the preaching of Christ during His earthly life, but to His cross-work. When the work of reconciliation was accomplished, then the “good news” was proclaimed. The message of peace is preached because of the death of the peace-maker, who made peace by means of His death and in His death slew the enmity of Jew and Gentile. The expression TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY is directed to Gentiles and TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR is addressed to Jews (cf. Isa. 57:19). It is only by the cross and after the cross that such a message can be preached.

### **IV. THE RESULT OF PEACE (v. 18)**

Through Christ Jesus men have peace with God and peace with each other. But specifically, Jew and Gentile in Christ have ACCESS (Gk. PROSAGOGEN, approach, lit. an introduction, cf. Rom. 5:2). We have the freedom to approach God (cf. Heb. 4:16, 10:22). In light of the preceding verses (2:1ff) this is astounding. It is by Christ IN ONE SPIRIT UNTO THE FATHER. Note again the Trinitarian emphasis (comp. Eph. 4:4; I Cor. 12:13).

**CONCLUSION:** The late James Boice asked, “Do you remember that incident from Matthew’s account of the death of Jesus in which, at the moment of his death, “the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matt.27:51)? Matthew is the preeminently Jewish Gospel, of course. So his reference to the curtain of the temple is one that would have been understood by every Jewish reader. It is a reference to the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, and the fact that it was torn in two from top to bottom indicates in as graphic a way as possible that as the result of Christ’s death, sin has been removed as a barrier between man and God, reconciliation has been achieved, and the way is now open for anyone to approach God – if he or she comes through faith in Jesus Christ and his work.<sup>3</sup> How are men ever to know peace? Apart from Jesus Christ there is no peace, nor will this world ever know peace outside of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah wrote, “There is no peace, says the LORD, for the wicked” (48:22 and 57:21). The peace that Christ brings is not by His example or teachings, but by His atoning death. The reconciliation that He effects is by means of His shed blood. Unless men have been stained with His blood and washed whiter than snow, they will continue to stain themselves with the blood of other men. All the efforts of the world to bring about peace outside of Christ are doomed to complete failure. All seeking after peace apart from Christ is an illusion. He is our peace.

### **ENDNOTES:**

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<sup>1</sup> Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of The Body of Christ* (Crossway, 1990) p. 90

<sup>2</sup> W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (St. Andre Press, 1958) p. 128

<sup>3</sup> James Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1997) p. 85.