



ONE NEW MAN

SERIES: THE RESTORATION OF MANKIND

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Ephesians 2:11-22
Eighth Message
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Every Christmas Eve, it is traditional in our home for one of my daughters to read the Christmas story from the gospel of Luke. I am always moved when I hear again the announcement of the angels to the shepherds on that wondrous night when Christ was born:

“Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all people; for today in the city of David there has been born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord...Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased.” (Luke 2:10,11,14)

When we are children, that longing for peace on earth resonates within us. But as we grow older, we find ourselves asking, “What peace?” Today, as we are singing “Peace on earth,” American troops are landing in Somalia. Hatred is so widespread in that famine-stricken land that a huge army is needed to feed the starving population. In Bosnia, a racial war that is being fought without quarter has resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands, without discrimination as to their age or sex. The Gaza Strip this past week has seen the fiercest fighting in 10 years in that troubled land. Two Israeli soldiers said on television last night they that feel like throwing up their hands. It’s a mess in that part of the world, they said.

But we don’t have to look to faraway lands to see turmoil and hatred. Much closer to home, even within our own families, we must confront enmities of long standing. Walls that have taken years to construct are especially apparent during the holiday season. Family occasions, which should be opportunities for joy and thanksgiving, instead become times of stress and argument. Many will identify with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s carol, composed in memory of the death of his son, who was killed in the Civil War:

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play —
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*I thought of how the day had come
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*And in despair I bowed my head,
There is no peace on earth, I said,
For hate is strong and mocks the song,
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

Where can we find this peace among men that we sing about at this time of year?

A careful look at our text this morning will show that the word “peace” is the key expression in this section of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In our last study, as the apostle reviewed the testimony of these Ephesian Christians, we saw that it was grace, and only

grace, that drew them up out of the dungeon of hell and reconciled them to God, thus establishing peace, as it were, in the vertical dimension. But the cross of Christ did more than this. The cross accomplished something far more significant than a mere legal maneuver designed to accomplish forgiveness for sin. Today we will see that the cross of Christ, amazingly, created a new society. The apostle refers to this new order as “one new man,” and its primary characteristic is peace.

Our text has three divisions: 1) a portrait of the old society, characterized by alienation (2:11-12); 2) the “one new man,” established through the work of Christ (2:13-18); and 3) the new society, founded in Christ (2:19-22).

I. The Portrait Of the Old Society 2:11,12

Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” {which is} performed in the flesh by human hands — {remember} that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

(a) We Were Alienated 2:12

Four statements used by the apostle describe the spiritual condition of the Gentiles before they came to Christ. First, they were “separate from Christ,” who was the source of all spiritual blessing. Second, they had no citizenship: they were “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.” Third, they had no hope: they were “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope.” And fourth, they were abandoned: they were “without God in the world.” They had to live in God’s world, yet they were “without God.”

A few years ago, a fellow-pastor and I went to minister for a couple of weeks in Honduras. On our flight down there, we saw in a news magazine article that CIA agents were at that time infiltrating into that politically sensitive part of the world. The article pointed out that these agents were easily recognizable because they all wore the same kind of clothes — blue jeans and plaid shirts — and they all had short hair. My heart sank. Both my friend and I were wearing exactly the clothes described — and we had short hair, too! When we got to Honduras, there was no one to meet us at the airport. It seemed that the man who was supposed to pick us up thought we were arriving the next day. So there we were, in a strange land, with no place to go, not speaking the language, without a friend to greet us. Things looked even grimmer when the military began shutting down the airport later in the evening. We had no advocate, no citizenship and no hope; we felt totally abandoned. What we experienced during those hours was similar to how the Gentiles felt before they came to Christ. They were, in William Hendricksen’s words, “Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless.”

To make matters worse, they were given labels of ridicule, based on fleshly distinctions, by the Jews.

(b) We Were Scorned and Ridiculed 2:11

Following the Babylonian captivity, this sense of estrangement between Jews and Gentiles became ever more pronounced. The Jews divided the world in two categories — Jews and idolators. William Barclay writes that this division ran so deep that “it was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was equivalent to death.”

In the Talmudic teaching, the rift became even deeper. The words of one tormented Jew during the Emperor Hadrian’s reign capture the spirit of the time: “the best of the Gentiles should be killed,” said this man.

These labels were reminders to the Gentiles of the contempt they were held in by the Jews. The word “Uncircumcision,” which Paul uses here, is really a euphemism for “foreskin.” The Jews addressed their Gentile neighbors with this derogatory, insulting epithet, “You foreskins!” How contemptuous! The Gentiles, of course, began to respond in kind. Down through the millennia, to this very day, the Jews have been the most hated of all races. Never in history has there been a division as great as that between Jews and Gentiles. It is the source of the Arab-Israeli conflict today, the Nazi Holocaust of World War II, and the many pogroms through the ages.

How critically important is our text today, therefore. It does nothing less than tell us how God brought about peace between these two great enemies. He brought peace to these warring races through the work of Christ in the “one new man.”

II. The One New Man 2:13-18

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both {groups into} one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, {which is} the Law of commandments {contained} in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, {thus} establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

(a) The Goal: “formerly far off, brought near” 2:13

From this text we can see that it was the purpose of God to bring near these Gentiles who were once far from him. But, under the Old Covenant, this presented a problem.

(b) The Problem: Enmity 2:15

The deep and long-lasting enmity between Jews and Gentiles was symbolized by the barrier of the dividing wall.

The temple in Jerusalem was set on an elevated platform. Around the temple was the courtyard of the priests. East of this court lay the court of Israel for the men, and further east was the court of the women. John R.W. Stott writes, “These three courts...were all on the same elevation as the temple itself. From this level one descended five steps to a walled platform, and then on the other side of the wall fourteen more steps to another wall, beyond which was the outer court or Court of the Gentiles.”

Thus the Gentiles could look up to, but not into the temple. Nor could they approach the temple, for the surrounding wall cut them off, and warning signs kept them away. Josephus describes the wall as “a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits. Its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars at equal distance from one another, declaring the laws of purity, some in Greek and some in Roman letters, that ‘no foreigner should go within that sanctuary.’ A sign three feet across said, ‘no foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure round the temple, anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.’”

The Ephesian Christians themselves had personal experience of this kind of separation. Some years earlier, Paul had brought a love offering to the saints in Jerusalem, and he was accompanied on that mission of mercy by a group of Gentile Christians. When a rumor spread that a Gentile named Trophimus, who was from Ephesus, had entered the temple area, although the story had no basis in fact, a riot ensued. This riot, which ended with Paul being thrown into prison, had caused hard feelings in Ephesus, sentiments that still were present when Paul wrote this letter.

I confess I had disdainful feelings myself when I came face to face with fleshly distinctions in London earlier this year as I witnessed the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace. A huge gate outside the palace separates royalty from the common folk, who press up against it in an effort to view the pageantry. I began to feel disdain for all the pomp and circumstance, and even enmity toward some VIPs who were allowed through. Later, when I viewed the Crown Jewels at the Tower of London, I felt even more disdainful of royalty. They are, after all, mere mortals, flesh and blood like you and me (as recent events have sadly shown), but they take honors to themselves that belong only to God.

In light of this enmity and division, therefore, we are forced to ask the question, why then did God constitute his people “according to the flesh” in the first place? The answer is that through one man, sin entered the human race. The promise was given to the woman that it was through her seed, in the weakness of human flesh, that God would crush the serpent (Gen. 3:16). And Israel would be the vehicle through whom that seed would come. The entire Old Testament looked forward to the coming of that seed, God-man in the flesh, which is the story of Christmas. In his coming, he instituted a whole new creation, born not “according to the flesh,” but “according to the Spirit.” From this point on there were to be no distinctions in the flesh.

This what the apostle declares in 14-16.

(c) The Solution: A New Creation 2:14-16

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both {groups into} one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, {which is} the Law of commandments {contained} in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, {thus} establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

God destroyed the old order and replaced it by creating “one new man.” We can illustrate this by saying that the Gentiles wanted to be admitted to this exclusive country club (God’s chosen people), but rather than sneaking them through the back door, God abolished the club entirely and established in its place a new society in Christ.

Three verbs describe God's actions in Christ: "He *abolished* in His flesh the enmity"; he "*broke down* the barrier of the dividing wall"; "*having put to death* the enmity." The sinless Christ was the only one who in his flesh was privileged to approach God in the temple. He took the enmity and the hatred upon himself and bore it for us. This was why he suffered and died, not inside but outside the city, outside the barrier wall, outside the camp. He "put to death the enmity," making it ineffective. This is how the barrier wall was broken down, rendering it totally ineffective. As a matter of fact, if Paul had written these words after 70 A.D., following the destruction of the temple by the Romans, he might have said that God's plan was to tear down not just the wall, but the whole temple complex.

This then is the message of Christmas. God came in the flesh, to bear the enmity in his flesh, to put to death in his flesh all distinctions of the flesh. He destroyed the old order to create one new man: "in order that in Himself He might make (literally, *create*) the two into one new man" — a transcendent new creation, in other words. It is noteworthy that the word "create" here has the same theological significance as the word used for creation in Genesis 1:1. This is referring, not to a reconstruction of the old order, but to the new creation — a brand new thing — the creation of one new man out of two. Is it any wonder the apostles were so thrilled that Jesus had reconstituted the people of God around himself, a new humanity born of spirit?

And what was the result of this new creation?

(d) Result Is Peace 2:14a,17,18

For He Himself is our peace...And he came and preached peace to you were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Instead of having to become a Jew in the flesh in order to approach God, God says that Christ, who is Israel, personally invites those who are far away and those who are near to come, and he announces peace to them, inviting them to be part of the people of God, through himself.

We see both groups becoming one as early as the Christmas story in the gospels. In the announcement of Christmas, of peace to those far away, the wise men responded to the star which appeared and to the prophecy of Micah. This was why they bypassed Jerusalem, going straight to Bethlehem by the word of the prophet to approach the God-man himself in the flesh. And peace was also preached to those who were near: the shepherds came to see the Babe of Bethlehem, availing themselves of this declaration of "peace among men with whom He is pleased." Thus in the Christmas scene, we see the Jews (the shepherds who were *near*) worshiping side by side with the Gentiles (the three kings who were *far away*). They were at peace one with another because the wall had been broken down, the enmity had been done away with.

We find the same thing in the story of the prodigal son, related by Jesus. This is the tale of two brothers, one of whom had strayed far away, while the other remained nearby, at home. Like the Gentiles, the prodigal spent his inheritance, yet the father sought him out and preached peace to him. The older brother was near, yet he too had to repent (he was outside the house as well) in order to be invited to the party which the father was planning for the returning, repentant son.

So there are no longer any fleshly distinctions. Had the church understood this, they would have never instituted worship of the virgin Mary. She, of course, had every physical privilege. She

conceived Jesus, gave birth to him and nourished him at her breast. A woman said to Jesus once, "Blessed are the breasts that nourished Thee." But Jesus replied, "No, blessed is he who does the will of God." Intimacy in the flesh gave Mary no spiritual advantage. She had to come to faith, just like everyone else. As a matter of fact, in the gospels she was rebuked for her desire to direct the ministry of Jesus. And after the resurrection, we find her worshipping Christ alongside the brothers as equals in the upper room.

And what would this new society look like?

III. The New Society

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are {members} of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner {stone}, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

(a) All Have the Same Status 2:19

In this new society, all are fellow-citizens with the saints and all are members of God's household. Everyone has full status. There is no trial or waiting period where Gentiles are given a "green card" while they wait for their heavenly citizenship. There are no second-class citizens in the new society.

This is why we have no membership requirements here in this church. Everyone who comes to Christ instantly becomes a member of his body. If we insist on membership, we have, in effect, erected a wall of division that includes some and excludes others. But, as we have seen, all, those who are far away and those who are near, are now included in this new order. We would also encourage you not to assert denominational distinctions. We go by the names, "Christian, brother, sister," because we all have the same status and standing in Christ.

(b) All Have the Same Heritage: Roots and foundations 2:20

When we decorate our Christmas tree, part of our tradition is that I hang the first ornament. (I hang the "Snoopy" ornament in the top right hand corner of the tree. He is wearing antlers because he thinks he's a reindeer.) Then we hang hand-made ornaments for each one of my children, including the two who died as infants, and one for my wife's mother. As we proceed, the children relive all the stories one by one and we are rooted and joined together more closely as a family. Now these traditions go back only about 15 years, but in Christ, our traditions as Christians go back all the way to Abraham. We are sons and daughters of Abraham, children of the royal line of David. His psalms, which became the prayers of Christ, now become our prayers, too. If we feel we don't have roots, it is because we don't journey with the patriarchs and the prophets and live in their writings. Reading and studying the Bible is the answer to rootlessness.

So we all have the same status and the same heritage.

There is a third thing.

(c) All Enter A New Place 2:21,22

We might expect the text to say here that now we are welcome to approach the temple in Jerusalem, that a guard will be placed there so we may come without fear of a riot, etc. But, we don't have to approach the temple now because *we* are the tem-

ple, a heavenly building that is growing into a holy temple, joined together by the Spirit. Notice in our text that what began in the flesh ends in the Spirit. It is a glorious place, a holy place, and what makes it glorious is the integration together of all of its parts. When you finally see this, your heart will be enlarged for the love of Christ.

I will conclude by drawing three implications from this marvelous text.

IV. Implications Of One New Man

(a) This Peace Is Found Nowhere Else

The text from Isaiah which Paul quotes from goes on to say,

**“Peace, peace to him who is far
and to him who is near,”
Says the LORD, “and I will heal him.
But the wicked are like the tossing sea,
For it cannot be quiet,
And its waters toss up refuse and mud.
There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”**
(Isaiah 57:19-21)

Now we know why Henry Wadsworth Longfellow could write these words,

*And in despair I bowed my head,
There is no peace on earth, I said.*

It was because he was looking for the heavenly temple in the wrong place. Peace, as we have learned from our text today, is found only in this one new man, the church.

(b) Don't Build Walls

But peace is destroyed when we build walls of enmity, based on fleshly distinctions. The blood of Christ bore the enmity and destroyed that wall, so we must never do anything to rebuild it and thereby create enmity between people.

In this new man, there are no age distinctions. Let us keep it this way. Let us welcome young and old, the child and the pensioner alike.

And there are no racial distinctions. First century Christians left their safe kosher circles to minister in Samaria, a dangerous place where they could have been killed for interacting with the hated Samaritans.

There are no political distinctions. God is neither Republican nor Democrat. There is “one new man.”

There are no nationalistic distinctions. God is not pro-American. He is not a Zionist, either. He does not take sides in the Israeli-Arab conflict. He has made “one new man,” who is neither Greek nor Jew, in Christ. An Arab brother who visited our Bible study asked me if I considered him a second-class citizen. No, I told him, Galatians actually regards him as a son of Abraham through his faith in Christ. Now I believe that God will convert the Jews at the climax of history, but when he does, he will not reconstruct the whole fleshly order of things again. Like us, the Jews will enter the new transcendent dimension of the heavenly temple. They will love Christ in that great day, and fi-

nally become what they were intended to become all along, the light of the world.

There are no social distinctions. Rich and poor alike will be participants in the “one new man.” This Christmas, you may invite someone to your home who comes from a different social category than you, perhaps someone who is suffering from AIDS. If you do, when you look across your table, you will see the temple of God. AIDS sufferers are the social outcasts of our day. A couple of weeks ago, a friend called me to say that a man wanted to come to our Wednesday morning Bible study and be baptized there. When Kirk came on the following Wednesday, he shared his testimony with us. He had lived with two other men, he said, one of whom had died, the second had full-blown AIDS, and he himself was HIV positive. He was scared to death, he told us, and he wanted to repent. I wondered if our men would embrace this new brother, so I asked anyone who wanted to come forward and lay hands on him to do so. One after another the men came forward to embrace him and weep with him. There were no distinctions.

(c) Worship In the New Temple

In order to have your heart enlarged for the love of Christ, you must see him in the fullness of his temple. Let God take you on the *complete tour* of this new temple and your heart will burst with appreciation for the glory of it! As I look back on my own life, I feel like the wise men who were filled with awe and appreciation as they beheld the glory of God on earth. Who am I, a Gentile, that I should see this Baby? When I was a boy, I played golf in a country club that did not allow blacks to join. Then, after I had come to Christ, God took me on a journey to Africa, in 1978. In Nigeria, I heard thousands of brothers and sisters worshipping Christ in song, worship like I had never heard before. There I saw the glory of God

As a boy, I lived among the exclusive rich. But then I came to Christ, and God taught me that it was the poor who had the true spiritual riches. He took me in his chariot to Romania, the most oppressed country in Eastern Europe, and there I saw the glory of God in a suffering people who sacrificed everything for Christ.

As a boy, I lived in all-Jewish neighborhood. I was the only Gentile on the block, yet I never understood the Jews. Then I came to Christ, and he took me to Israel. There I discovered that my real roots were not in California or in Wales, but in Bethlehem, in the city of David. Ten years later, I met a Jew. This man in his brokenness placed no confidence in the flesh, and I had the joy of leading him to Christ. The one who was far away preached peace to the one who was near. Through him and his family, his father, his wife and children and his ministry, my eyes have seen the beautiful courtyards of the heavenly temple, the glory of Christ himself.

The saying was true. He “preached peace to him who was far away, and peace to him who was near,” and the two became the “one new man.”

*Glory be to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.*

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