

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XXVIII : VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL RECONCILIATION (2:11-22)

Discussion on the Reconciliation of the Gentiles with Jewish Christians (2:14-18)

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. (KJV)

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 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. (NIV)

for he is our peace, who did make both one, and the middle wall of the enclosure did break down, the enmity in his flesh, the law of the commands in ordinances having done away, that the two he might create in himself into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile both in one body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity in it, and having come, he did proclaim good news — peace to you — the far-off and the nigh, because through him we have the access — we both — in one Spirit unto the Father. (Young’s Literal Translation)

v14 — As we have already noted, vv. 14-18 stand by themselves because we change at v. 14 from the second person (‘you’) to the first person (‘I, me, us, our’) and return to the former at v. 19. Christ also becomes the subject of the verbs of vv. 14-18 whereas the Gentiles is the subject in the sections immediately before and after. *“These verses form the centrepiece of 2:11-22 and explain how the readers’ coming near was made possible through Christ’s death. It is an important section, for it shows just how deep the division was between Jews and Gentiles before Christ’s coming, and what he has done to bring these two entities into one new humanity.”* [O’Brien, 191]

STRUCTURE — “The structure of the paragraph is rather elaborate. The opening statement, ‘he himself is our peace’, forms a title to the section and equates Christ with peace. This is followed by three participles whose subject is Christ (‘made’, v. 14; ‘destroyed’, v. 14; and ‘abolished’, v. 15) and which form ‘a series of positive and negative statements regarding either making into one or destroying enmity in its various forms’. The participles lead on to two purpose clauses (‘to create’, v. 15, and ‘to reconcile’, v. 16). Vv. 17 and 18 are a new sentence which refers to Christ’s proclamation of peace to both Gentile and Jew (v. 17), together with the ground (‘for’) of this announcement (v. 18).” [O’Brien, 192f] (note: a participle is a verbal adjective) This may be expressed in the following pattern:

what Christ did	He himself is our peace who <u>made</u> both one and <u>destroyed</u> the barrier, the fence that separated them, having <u>abolished</u> in his flesh the hostility, the law of commandments consisting in regulations,
why Christ did what He did	<u>to create</u> in himself one new humanity out of the two, so making peace, and <u>to reconcile</u> both to God, having put to death the hostility.
OT quote	And he came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near;
sum	For through him we both together have access in one Spirit to the Father.

I agree with those Bible teachers who consider this section as a quote from possibly an ancient hymn or Jewish midrash (commentary). If Paul had written this today it may have looked something like this:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh — who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands — that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ‘And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.’ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (NKJV)

Here is Paul’s ‘flow of thought’ for today’s sections. Note Paul states the former position of the Gentiles (vv 11,12), makes a statement of their present condition (v 13), then appears to give a quote to support his statement (vv 14-18):

command to Gentile Christians to remember their former position ...

¹¹ *Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh —*

a further defining of the Gentiles as considered by the Jews

who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands —

... continuing in the original command to “remember”

¹² *that at that time you were*

- *without Christ,*
- *being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and*
- *strangers from the covenants of promise,*
- *having no hope and*
- *without God in the world.*

contrast with the Gentile Christians’ past with their present position

¹³ *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

emphatic statement of Christ not “making” peace but “is” our peace!

¹⁴ *For He Himself is our peace,*

explanation of how Jesus Christ is our peace

- *who has made both [Jewish and Gentile believers] one [new humanity],*
- *and has broken down the middle wall of separation,*

further defining how “the dividing wall of hostility” was broken down

¹⁵ *having abolished [by nullifying, by rendering ineffective] in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances,*

purpose clauses

so as to create

in Himself one new man [the new humanity] from the two, [Jewish and Gentile believers] thus making peace, [horizontal peace between Jew and Gentile]

¹⁶ *and that He might reconcile*

them both to God in one body [the local assembly, the local church] through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. [vertical peace between both Jewish and Gentile believers with God]

OT scripture support from Isaiah 57:19

¹⁷ *And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.*

application of OT scripture reference to the Jewish and Gentile Christians

¹⁸ *For through Him we both have access [freedom, or right to enter] by one [Holy] Spirit to the Father.*

THE CONTEXT IS HORIZONTAL PEACE BASED UPON OUR VERTICAL PEACE WITH GOD — I emphasize this because there are those who take selected verses from this portion of scripture to refer (out of context) to our personal salvation; e.g.,

“He himself is our peace who ... destroyed the barrier, the fence that separated them, having abolished in his flesh the hostility, the law of commandments consisting in regulations” — “*See, Christ abolished the law and thus reconciled us to God.*” **While that is a true statement, that is not what these verses are teaching!**

Here are verses 14–16 in various translations that emphasize the correct context:

¹⁴ “*For He is [Himself] our peace (our bond of unity and harmony). He has made us both [Jew and Gentile] one [body], and has broken down (destroyed, abolished) the hostile dividing wall between us,* ¹⁵ *By abolishing in His [own crucified] flesh the enmity [caused by] the Law with its decrees and ordinances [which He annulled]; that He from the two might create in Himself one new man [one new quality of humanity out of the two], so making peace.* ¹⁶ *And [He designed] to reconcile to God both [Jew and Gentile, united] in a single body by means of His cross, thereby killing the mutual enmity and bringing the feud to an end.*” [Amplified Bible]

¹⁴ “*Christ himself is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles one people [both one], and broke down the wall of hate [hostility; enmity] that divided them [the wall beyond which Gentiles could not pass in the Jerusalem temple, or the law of Moses that distinguished Jew from Gentile (see v. 15)] by giving his own body [in his flesh; this phrase may go with the following sentence].* ¹⁵ *He did this by ending [setting aside; nullifying] the law of commands and rules by giving his own body [in his flesh; this phrase may go with the previous sentence]. His purpose was to make the two groups of people become one new people [humanity; person; man] in him and in this way make peace.* ¹⁶ *It was also Christ’s purpose to end [put to death; kill] the hatred [hostility; enmity] between the two groups, to make them into one body, and to bring them back [reconcile them] to God. Christ did all this with his death on the cross [...through the cross].”* [Expanded Bible]

¹⁴ “*For Christ himself has brought us peace by making Jews and Gentiles one people. With his own body he broke down the wall that separated them and kept them enemies.* ¹⁵ *He abolished the Jewish Law with its commandments and rules, in order to create out of the two races one new people in union with himself, in this way making peace.* ¹⁶ *By his death on the cross Christ destroyed their enmity; by means of the cross he united both races into one body and brought them back to God.”* [Good News Translation]

“*For Christ is our living peace. He has made a unity of the conflicting elements of Jew and Gentile by breaking down the barrier which lay between us. By his sacrifice he removed the hostility of the Law, with all its commandments and rules, and made in himself out of the two, Jew and Gentile, one new man, thus producing peace. For he reconciled both to God by the sacrifice of one body on the cross, and by this act made utterly irrelevant the antagonism between them.*” [Phillips NT]

¹⁴ “*For Christ himself is our way of peace. He has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one family, breaking down the wall of contempt that used to separate us.* ¹⁵ *By his death he ended the angry resentment between us, caused by the Jewish laws that favored the Jews and excluded the Gentiles, for he died to annul that whole system of Jewish laws. Then he took the two groups that had been opposed to each other and made them parts of himself; thus he fused us together to become one new person, and at last there was peace.* ¹⁶ *As parts of the same body, our anger against each other has disappeared, for both of us have been reconciled to God. And so the feud ended at last at the cross.”* [Living Bible]

While the direct context speaks of the ancient Jewish / Gentile relationships within the body of Christ, it could apply today to all church relationships. One passage that immediately comes to mind relating to our dealings with others is as follows:

“*Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*” (Rom 12:16-21 NKJV)

What strikes me in the midst of the preceding verses is how practical the Word of God is: ‘if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.’ God calls us to peace and harmony with all men, especially within the house of God, but also recognizes we are sinners living in a fallen world and makes accommodations for when that high goal is not achieved. ‘As much as is possible...’. Another pertinent passage has to do with church discipline:

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” (Matt 18:15-17 NKJV)

If problems cannot be settled on a personal level then it should be brought before the brethren in the church, not with the intent of ‘kicking someone out of church’ but rather with the hope, prayer and intent of seeing a sinning brother repent and get their life right with the Lord. If that is just not possible with the erring brother then they are to set outside the church, but that is not the goal. And once outside the church, they are to be treated like ‘the heathen and tax collectors’; i.e., they are to be sought after and brought back if possible.

THE ORIGIN OF THIS SECTION — Due to the differences in this short portion from the rest of this section, there is much speculation as to its origin. Ernest Best considers several possible origins and comes to the conclusion that none really answers all the questions as to where this is derived: *“None of these suggestions is very satisfactory.”* [Best, 250] *While we may never know its true origin, we rest on the truth that the Holy Spirit guided Paul to insert these comments regardless of its source.* Note Paul is not alone in quoting heathens and external sources when writing scripture (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12; Jude 14,15). The major theories are as follows, the least likely first:

- **A PRE-CHRISTIAN Gnostic REDEEMER MYTH** — “Some have thought that its origin is from a pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer myth which speaks of the union of heavenly and earthly worlds in mythological terminology, but that is generally not accepted today because it just does not fit the context. Rather, the context speaks of the reconciliation of redeemed Jews and Gentiles to each other and to God from whom both were estranged.” [Hoehner, 364f] Typically those who accept this theory accept a late date for the book of Ephesians (2nd century AD).
- **A BAPTISMAL FORMULA** — “Others think it speaks of the believers’ baptism but there is no hint of this in the whole context.” [Hoehner, 364f]
- **A DIGRESSION** — “It is easiest to see this as an explanatory digression to emphasize for the reader the means by which Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled to each other and to God, possibly based on Isa 57:19 (‘Peace, peace, to the far and to the near, says the Lord; and I will heal him’), though Isaiah is talking about Jews living ‘near’ at home and those living ‘far away’ in dispersion. *It is not unusual for Paul to digress in order to give a fuller explanation of what he had just stated.*” [Hoehner, 364f]
- **A JEWISH MIDRASH** — *This identification of vv. 14-18 as a hymnic fragment has been disputed, however, [by some who regard] it as a Christian midrash on Isaiah 57:19 [along with two other Isaiah passages].* [O’Brien, 192] A midrash is ‘an early Jewish interpretation of or commentary on a Biblical text, clarifying or expounding a point of law or developing or illustrating a moral principle.’
- **AN EARLY CHRISTIAN HYMN** — This is probably the most favored opinion. Lincoln lists some of the reasons why many scholars believe Paul used existing hymnic material as a basis for vv. 14-18: the break with the surrounding context of the contrast schema; the “we” style that interrupts the “you” style of address; the pointedly Christological content of the material; the heavy use of participles; the piling up of a number of words that are only used in these verses in the NT; and the awkward syntax which suggests interpretation. *“Such features ... have made it seem more probable that we are dealing with hymnic material that has been reworked.”* [Lincoln, 127] *“Because vv. 14-18 apparently stand as a unit, most scholars identify them as a hymnic fragment....* The formal characteristics of the passage, including the unique words, the use of participles, the intensely christological content, the parallelism of the lines, and the ‘we’ style which interrupts the ‘you’ style (of vv. 13, 19-22), lead most scholars to conclude that it is hymnic.” [O’Brien, 192] However not all accept this theory: “Others have thought of it as an early Christian hymn, but this has also been called into question. Even among its advocates there is disagreement as to where the hymn ends and how it is to be divided.” [Hoehner, 364f]

For he himself — *Αὐτὸς γάρ* [autos gar] Emphatic because of position. Some takes this to mean “He Himself and no other” while some state there is no contrast implied in the grammar.

THE THEME OF THIS PARAGRAPH: PEACE — *“Verse 14a provides the theme or text for vv. 14-18, peace. The word itself appears three times and the theme is also expressed through the ideas of ‘reconciliation’, ‘oneness’ and their opposite ‘enmity’.”* [Best, 250] “Paul begins with an important affirmation about Christ which confirms and explains how the readers’ coming near was made possible through his death (v. 13): *For he himself is our peace....* These opening words stand like a title to the whole passage and introduces the vital theme of ‘peace’ (vv. 14-18). As he explains the wonder of Christ’s reconciling work within this short, concentrated section, Paul employs the term ‘peace’ four times (vv. 14, 15, 17 [twice]), as well as the related motifs of reconciliation (v. 16), making the two into one (v. 14), creating one new humanity (v. 15), and gaining access to the Father in one Spirit (v. 18). Furthermore, the antonym of peace, ‘enmity’, is pressed into service to specify the nature of the hostility that has been destroyed and ‘killed’ by Christ in his peacemaking work.

Is it any wonder that Ephesians 2:14-18 is regarded as the locus classicus on peace in the Pauline letters (cf. Rom 5:1-11)?” [O’Brien, 193] *It is important to note: God wants us to have peace! Although we were born sinners and at enmity with our Heavenly Father, we have objective peace*

locus classicus – noun: a passage considered to be the best known or most authoritative on a particular subject

through the work and merits of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ:

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1 NKJV)

Now having this objective peace with God through the blood of Christ, the Lord now wants us to experience peace in our lives:

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 NKJV)

“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” (Rom 8:6 NKJV) This does not mean that when we think worldly we have no peace, although that is true. Paul is saying here that those who have been saved have life and peace; i.e., they are to be characterized by abundant living and peace.

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom 14:17 NKJV)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (Gal 5:22,23 NKJV)

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.” (Col 3:15 NKJV)

Do we have this peace of God in our hearts? Many would have to answer they do not, so the question arises why not? I may not be able to speak for others but in my own life, **peace disappears when I am unthankful and dissatisfied with my immediate circumstances! Peace disappears when I do not get my own way! How often we forget the objective of our lives: to honor the Lord in all we do and say. God is not a sadist that takes glee in our sorrows, but He does have the stated goal of conforming us to the image of Christ. If problems sets our focus on the Lord and prayer, then He will give us problems. Our response to these should be as follows:**

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Phi 4:6,7 NKJV)

None of us does this perfectly. Let us pray one for another that we may grow in this grace of prayer, thanksgiving and peace!

CHRIST NOT ONLY MAKES PEACE AND PROCLAIMS PEACE BUT IS OUR PEACE — is our peace — ἐστὶν ἡ εἰρήνη [estin hē eirēnē] *“He himself, not just what he did (necessary as that was and is). He is our peace with God and so with each other (Jews and Gentiles).”* [Robertson, Word Pictures] *“The identification of Christ with peace is at first sight surprising; we more naturally think of him as making peace (v. 15) or proclaiming it (v. 17) than being it; the identification parallels that in which he proclaims the word and is the Word, is life and gives life (Col 3.4; cf. 1 Cor 1.30), or where believers are light and impart light (5.8).”* [Best, 251] *“For the far to come near, peace needed to be made between both groups. That peace has its source in, or, even stronger, is embodied in Christ... **Peace, in v 14, is not merely a concept nor even a new state of affairs, it is bound up with a person.** Christ can be said to be not only a peacemaker or a bringer of peace but peace in person. The title ‘prince of peace’ in Isa 9:6 may have prepared the way for such an attribution of peace to a person, but the language here is hardly an allusion to that verse. Later rabbinic thought could call the name of God and of the Messiah ‘peace’ but not, of course, in specific connection with Jews and Gentiles. **That Christ himself is seen as the peace between the two groups here in v 14 is in line with the thought of v 15 that the making of peace, by creating one new person in place of two, occurred ‘in himself.’** This identification of Christ with the blessings of salvation that he brings can be found in other places in the Pauline corpus (cf. 1 Cor 1:30; Col 1:27; 3:4).”* [Lincoln, 140] *“He has not brought about peace by a mere external action or arrangement; it is in His own person that He gives it.”* [Abbott, 60] *“Christ not only brings peace and reconciliation; he is this peace or, to put it another way, peace is a person, Jesus Christ.”* [O’Brien, 193]

WHAT IS PEACE? — “Jewish and Greek thinking on peace differed.... We can assume [Paul’s] readers once they had been converted would quickly become alert to the cluster of new ideas which came with the word from Judaism. They would of course also have brought with them into their Christianity **ideas of peace which belonged to the Greco-Roman world in which they lived; there peace signified a condition of non-war in which stability and good order flourished. While for a Jew it could signify the absence of conflict (6.15), it also meant much more.** Since the theme of conflict between Jew and Gentile or between either and God is at best only implicit in 2.11-13, it is proper to understand peace here in its wider Jewish sense where it refers to both physical and spiritual well-being, comes close to meaning salvation and attains eschatological significance. **Peace is the end of alienation; people can be alienated from God, from one another or internally alienated; the first two aspects are present here, the third is not. Peace as salvation is God’s gift Peace is again understood with its Jewish significance in going beyond the cessation of hostility to the total well-being of those to who it is offered. It is not merely, ‘I am no longer angry with you’, but more positively, ‘I seek your well-being.’”** [Best, 251f, 270] I repeat something I have mentioned several times in recent lessons: **when a person is not right with God, he is not right with anyone.**

“BOTH” = JEWISH AND GENTILE CHRISTIANS — who has made us both one — ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφοτέρω ἐν [ho poiēsās ta amphotera hen] *“In the clause ‘who has made both one,’ ‘both’ and ‘one’ are in the neuter, denoting entities. The neuter can be used of general categories of people, but this is strange here after the masculine plural relative pronouns and participial endings in v 11-13.... **In this context, however, the reference is clearly to the two groups of people previously***

discussed, the Gentiles and the Jews. They have not just been brought into a mutual relationship, but have been made one in a unity where both are no longer what they previously were. In accomplishing this, Christ has transcended one of the fundamental divisions of the first-century world.” [Lincoln, 140f] *“Lit., ‘Who made both things one thing,’ ‘Both’ and ‘one’ are neuters in the Gr. The idea is rather of positions and relations than persons. ‘One’ – ‘one thing,’ one community, or rather, one organism.”* [Moule, 79; also Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 294] “Somewhat surprisingly, the nouns two and one are neuter, denoting entities. In the light of vv. 11-13 one might have expected masculine plurals to indicate the two groups of people previously mentioned, namely, Gentiles and Jews. But the neuter can be used for persons or groups of persons (cf. 1 Cor 1:27, 28; Gal 3:22; John 6:37, 39; 17:2; 1 John 5:4), and there is no doubt in this context that Paul has these two groups in mind. They have been brought into a mutual relationship and a unity which surpasses what they once were (cf. vv. 15, 16, 18)... *If Jews spoke of humanity being divided into Jews and Gentiles, then Paul makes a threefold division: Jews, Greeks (i.e., Gentiles), and the church of God (1 Cor 10:32). Later Christians were to speak of themselves as a ‘third race’ or ‘new race’ — neither Jewish or Gentile.*” [O’Brien, 194F] As an example, here is a quote from church father Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 - c. 215 AD):

‘Accordingly, then, from the Hellenic training, and also from that of the law are gathered into the one race of the saved people those who accept faith’ [Clement, Stromateis book 6 chapter 5]

“Our peace:’ i.e., as the connexion indicates, the ‘peace’ between ... the Gentile and Jewish believers; such peace that now, within the covenant, ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek’ (Gal iii. 28; Col iii. 11). The special aspect of this truth here is the admission of the non-Jewish believer to the inmost fulness of spiritual privilege; but this is so stated as to imply the tender companion truth that he comes in not as a conquering intruder but as a brother, side by side with the Jewish believer, in equal and harmonious peace with God.” [Moule, 78f] *“Race and national distinctions vanish in Christ. If all men were really in Christ, war would disappear.”* [Robertson, Word Pictures] “The context shows that what is primarily intended is the union of Jews and Gentiles; but as it was not this union of itself that was of importance, but the essential basis of it, as the union of both in one body of Christ, it is manifest that the idea of peace with God could not be absent from the mind of the apostle in writing [‘is our peace’].” [Abbott, 60]

“LIFTED TO A GREATER NOBILITY” — *“Not, says Chrysostom, that He has brought us to that nobility of theirs, but both us and them to a greater; as if one should melt down a statue of silver and one of lead, and the two should come out gold.”* [Abbott, 61]

“BELIEVERS, NOT JUST JEWS / GENTILES” — *“The two groups are not strictly Jews and Gentiles; it is Christians from both these groups who are made into the new group. Jews and Gentiles as such still exist as independent groups.”* [Best, 253]

