

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

It was September, 1938. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returned from top-level meetings in Nazi Germany. Chamberlain was convinced that peace had been negotiated with Adolf Hitler after his audacious Anschluss (forced annexation) of Austria. Chamberlain said, ***“Peace in our time. Peace with honor.”*** The next year, Hitler’s troops overran Poland. Under Winston Churchill’s leadership, England’s parliament agonizingly declared war on Germany. (If you get the chance to watch the movie *Darkest Hour*, I recommend it.)

How many peace treaties have been negotiated over the course of centuries? Each treaty promises lasting peace. How many of them have actually worked?

Paul talks about peace in Ephesians 2. He helps us understand that ***We Enjoy A Lasting, Meaningful Peace*** (1) ***Peace with God through Jesus’ blood***, and (2) ***Peace with each other through Jesus’ Word***.

1

Try to picture the world through the eyes of Paul. For centuries, the Jews understood themselves to be God’s chosen people. God set up a religious and social hedge, a dividing wall, between the Jews and all the surrounding nations -- the Gentiles. Jews did not associate with Gentiles. If they did, they were considered to be unclean.

Then came Jesus, and everything changed. The Jews who became followers of Jesus had trouble believing that salvation could ever come to the Gentiles. Then they reasoned that maybe Gentiles would have a chance to be saved if they first became “Jews,” that is, if they kept certain food and cleansing laws, and then became Christians.

Paul strongly disagreed. He stressed that all of humanity is saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone -- no matter what background, heritage, ethnicity, or race. He says, ***“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away (you Gentiles who knew nothing about the true God) have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”*** Look at the action. Salvation is not initiated by humans, but by the God who made humans. He says that Jesus came ***“to reconcile both of them (Jew and non-Jew) to God through the cross,”*** and adds, ***“we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”***

So in Christ, you already possess the greatest, most meaningful peace: peace with God. Oh, I know our sins don’t give us much peace. We struggle with sin all the time. Our lives are often in upheaval. We wallow in guilt. But Paul says about Jesus: ***“He himself is our peace!”*** Our sins are many, but Jesus’ perfect life and the holy blood he shed ***“reconciled”*** perfect God and unholy mankind. Jesus made the two, one: no division, just eternal unity!

Although we live in a chaotic, sinful world, we never have to wonder where we stand with God. We are ***“members of God’s household...with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”*** Our brother Jesus brought us into his family. By grace, we are co-heirs with Christ. That takes the panic out of death!

An artist was asked to paint a picture capturing the essence of peace. So he painted a roaring waterfall with a tree hanging over it. The powerful spray thundered upward toward and around the tree. But in a fork in one of the branches was a little bird safely, calmly tucked into her nest. Not a care in the world; totally at peace.

In Christ we find our peace in a turbulent world filled with the thundering roar of sin and powerful distractions. Jesus’ forgiving love is our tranquility. “God and sinner, reconciled.”

2

Paul also says that since we have this peace with God (vertically), we are also able to have peace with one another (horizontally). ***“He (Jesus) has made the two (Jew and Gentile) one and has de-***

stroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” He adds, *“In him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”* When we are at peace with God, the fire of hatred for other people will have a difficult time burning, like hot coals tossed onto a glacier. The glacier wins. Jesus doesn’t hate, so his brothers and sisters learn not to hate. Love wins.

Why doesn’t Jesus hate? The concept is simple: Jesus doesn’t hate because Jesus loves, and love is marked not by feelings and emotions, but by actions. Christ’s actions were always, always, unselfish! Peace happens when I recognize that others are more important than I am. The Lord teaches, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves”* (Phil 2:3-4).

So what does that mean?

- Living at peace with others means that we will speak to others and treat others as we would want to be treated and spoken to by them (Jesus’ Golden Rule).
- It means that we learn to control ourselves and will not blow up at others, cut them down, or call them names (whether to their face or behind their backs).
- It means we will not bully people whether physically, emotionally, or verbally so we can have our own way and be in control.
- It means we will show proper respect to others, especially those whom God has placed over us in the home, government and church.
- It means we will not judge people by their bloodline, skin color, cultural background, or language.

Paul made the point to the Jewish and the Gentile Christians that they were not to look down their noses at each other. All of them were equally sinners and all of them were equally saved. His point? **Living in peace is how the Church glorifies the Savior.**

Paul knew that unity and peace grow as we go to God’s Word. We are built *“on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”* Those are the people who wrote the Old and New Testaments by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It makes perfect sense, then, that the more we worship together and study God’s Word together, the more our faith will grow and the more our unity and peace will flourish -- and have greater meaning in our lives.

A father and son were at odds with each other for years. Neither would speak to the other or try to make up. The mother did everything she could to reunite them, but to no avail. Finally, when mother was on her deathbed, circumstances brought the father and son into the same room. It was awkward. As they watched her breathing become shallower, the mother took their hands and brought them together into hers near her heart. Father and son both realized how silly they had been and began to weep as all kinds of regrets swept over them. At last they hugged and apologized, and for the first time in years there was peace. Mother got to see the family at peace before she went home to heaven.

On the cross, Jesus put the hands of you and me and all his people into his. He gave us peace with the Father. He brought us all together and gave us peace with one another. May Christ’s forgiving love lead us to live in true peace with each other and, in doing so, bring glory to Jesus.

Amen.