



THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS

THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

EPHESIANS 2:14-17

One New Man

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In this season of coronavirus and societal unrest, most people are striving for peace. Right now, our friends and neighbors are looking for relief from financial, personal, political, and spiritual pressures. Most are longing and searching for peace. This search is in reality a search for identity, and identity always shapes mission.

Church family, our identity is that we are in Christ and our mission is to unite all things in him (Ephesians 1:6). This identity and this mission brings peace. Therefore, we have the answers to our society's most pressing questions. Not only do



we know the answers, we also know the hopelessness of once being lost and without hope in the world (Ephesians 2:11-13). So what shall we do? We must listen and learn what Paul says about our identity in Ephesians 2:14-16.

The main point of these verses is that Christ has made a new humanity in himself. The identity of this new humanity is not what differentiates us from one another, but it is what binds us together. Let's know our primary identity as Christians and hold onto this during this difficult season because this is the mission of God itself.

JESUS IS OUR PEACE (2:14)

“*14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility*

Christ himself is our peace. Now, peace is a term that we know it when we experience it but seems to escape a precise definition. We often describe peace as the absence of conflict. For example, we ask for some “peace and quiet” when we’d like a temporary escape from the stresses of life. Similarly, Timon and Pumbaa



from Lion King, define peace as “Hakuna Matata” – “no worries.” Now, we are right to describe peace as an “absence of conflict.” Timon and Pumbaa are, likewise, right. Peace causes no worries, but these are negative descriptions. When we describe peace as the “absence of conflict” or a state of “no worries” we are not telling anyone what peace is but only what it is not.

So what is peace? Peace is a blessing (Ps 29:11). More specifically, it is a blessing of wholeness and completeness. We see this more basic idea in a verse like Jeremiah 13:19 when Jeremiah says that God’s people will be completely taken into exile. The word for completely is the Hebrew word for “peace.” The basic idea is that the term peace denotes wholeness and completeness. Therefore, when Paul says that we have peace with God, he is saying that our relationship with God is whole and complete. So indeed, we could negatively say, “Peace is no worries” or peace is “the absence of conflict.” We do better by defining it positively. It is a blessing of wholeness in our relationship with God. This wholeness results in “no worries” and “no conflict” but it is much more.

Peace is a blessing of wholeness in our relationship with God.



Paul links peace to Jesus in the most direct way. He says, “Jesus is our peace.” Yes, Jesus makes peace (2:15) and preaches peace (2:17), but more directly, he is our peace. Notice what Paul says in verse 14. Jesus is our peace because he is the one “who.” The word “who” does not focus on an action Jesus did, but describes to us who Jesus is. Peace, ultimate peace, then is found only in Jesus. Friends and church family, we must know that the blessing of wholeness will not ultimately be found in legislation. Although we should seek just laws, our peace cannot be rooted in them. Ultimate peace will not be found in economic advancement. Although economic advancement can be stewarded to the glory of God, ultimate peace is not found there. Ultimate peace is found in Jesus because he is the peace of his people.

Jesus is our peace because of what he does. Although Paul focuses on who Jesus is in verse 14, he describes who Jesus is by what he did. Paul says he “made us one” and “has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.” Jesus is our peace, then, because he completes the mission of God. The mission has already been described by Paul as the task of uniting all things in Christ – all, here refers to all types of people: that is Jews and Gentiles. Therefore, in Christ, the people have peace because Jesus brings this old creation to completion in a new and better creation.



How? Jesus breaks down the cultural hostility by abolishing the laws of the OT. The laws in the OT were good but, they divided people based on culture. Remember, if a Gentile in the OT trusted in the Lord, they had to become culturally a Jew since faith always leads to works. The works of the OT were tied to one culture – the Sabbath, the festivals, circumcision, and the rest. That, however, is the old way. Now, these laws no longer regulate our relationship to God because Christ fulfilled these laws.

Christ fulfilled these laws for two purposes: 1) to create one new man (2:15) and 2) to reconcile us to God (2:16).

1) TO CREATE ONE NEW MAN (2:15)

“*15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,*

The purpose of Christ, then, is to create a new humanity: a humanity whose identity is rooted in what unites us together, not in what differentiates us. What unites us together is Christ – we are in Christ. We live in a society that roots identity in differences. The pull to find the core of who we are in what differentiates us



from others is pandemic and it is destructive. Racism, in all of its forms, seeks identity in what differentiates us. This why it is destructive at its core. We must live out our identity as new creation. Thus, one very easy application is racism has absolutely no place in the church because racism at its core is contrary to the new humanity that Christ has created. Derogatory jokes that objectify people because of their cultural background are demonic and resurrect the dividing walls of hostility that Christ has broken down. Similarly, jokes that objectify men or women have no place in the church. The church must be the place in this broken world where we relate to one another, not fundamentally on the basis of what differentiates us, but on what unites us together – Christ.

Unfortunately, the proclivity to root identity in what differentiates us from others is extensive in our society. This tendency is found especially in youth. Every youth growing up feels like they need to have a thing – a sport, a music talent, good looks, something that makes them different than others. This difference is what we call being “special.” And to the destruction of our children, parents too often fuel this tendency by promoting their “special talents.” This tendency is not the new man; it is the old man.

Jesus has created a new humanity that is identified primarily by what unites this new humanity together – Christ.



Now, this does not mean that all Christians are the same. We are not. This new humanity is not marked by sameness but by unity and equality amid differences. Equality amid differences is an immense glory that marks the new man. We learn about this in Revelation 7. There, people from every tribe, tongue, and language are praising God. This is glorious because it pictures to the world that our God is not simply the god over one culture – that is polytheism. In polytheism, gods are restricted to certain territories and peoples. This is not so. The one true God reigns over all cultures. Thus, this new man includes people from all cultures and this is glorious because it depicts the majesty of our God. He is God of all. Thus, the one new man that Christ has created is a community of people from all cultures that are fundamentally united together by Christ – their commonality. All Christians are in Christ.

Our church then must be a church where every member regardless of cultural background rejoices and experiences the equal dignity, they have by being in Christ. Our church must also learn, and respect cultural differences represented in our church because the vast number of cultures represented depicts to us, the watching world, and to the demonic forces the immense glory of God.



2) TO RECONCILE US TO GOD (2:16)

“ *16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.*

Christ makes a new humanity that is not only united together in Christ, but one that is also reconciled to God. The unity that Christians experience as the new man is a unity with God. Jesus is so powerful that he not only reconciles humans who have experienced centuries of hostility, he also has the power to reconcile humans who have engaged in hostile activity against God for millennia. Paul has already told us that the Ephesian church was formerly spiritually dead (2:1), followers of the devil (2:2), children of wrath (2:3), separated from Christ (2:12), alienated from Israel (2:12), strangers to the covenants of promise (2:12), without Christ (2:12), and without hope (2:12). But notice that Paul says that these realities were “former” realities (2:1-3; 11-13). The Ephesians now experience a new reality in their relationship to God. Now, we are brought near as beloved children (2:4-10; 14-22).



CONCLUSION

Church family, we live in a very divided world. Many are responding to this division with anger, frustration, and even despair. Let's respond with compassion. We too once rooted our identity in what divided us from others, and, oh, what an awful state we were in. Let's show compassion to the those who still seek life in the old man, not anger. Moreover, let's commit to being a church that roots our identity in Christ yet respects and honors our differences. The differences actually magnify the glory of Jesus since he reigns over a new humanity made up of people from all nations.

LET'S PRAY

Father unite us together more deeply in Christ. Let us know you power, your hope, and you calling more deeply. Let us remember how your power has brought us who were far near. Let this reality lead us to pray with passion, praise with joy, and to fight to maintain our unity. We pray these things in Jesus name, amen.