



# THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS

THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

## EPHESIANS 2:17-22

### A New Era

Pastor Anthony Ferguson

Peace has evaded many in 2020. Here is a list of some of the chaotic events of 2020: Fires raging in Australia, America kills Iranian General Soleimani, Iran launched missiles at two American military bases injuring two soldiers, Iran shot down Ukraine International flight 752 killing all 176 passengers on board, the impeachment and then acquittal of President Donald Trump, the spread of COVID-19 from China to the rest of the world, lockdowns around the world, hundreds of thousands of deaths worldwide because of COVID-19, the official withdrawal of the UK from the EU, problems in the Iowa Democratic caucus regarding recording votes, the volatility of the stock market, the beginning of the



pandemic-recession, the postponement of the Olympics and countless other sports leagues, a food crisis in Africa, protestors in Hong Kong receiving life sentences in prison, and increased racial tension in America. Peace has evaded many in 2020, but peace does not evade Christians.

The main idea of this sermon is that our church is, in fact, the new era that history points toward, and this era is characterized by peace with God, access to God, an intimate relationship with God, and profoundly glorious reality. Let's investigate these truths together in Ephesians 2.

## THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IS CHARACTERIZED BY PEACE (17)

“ *17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.*”

In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul discusses how God has created a new humanity who are united, not by their common ethnic background, but by being in Christ. We learned last week in verses 14-16 that this community is characterized by peace. Jesus is our peace because he made peace. He brought those who were far from God near through his blood.



Paul continues to explain that the Christian community is characterized by peace in verse 17. Here, we learn that Jesus preached peace both to Jews and Gentiles. Now, Jesus preached a message of peace to Jews throughout his earthly ministry (Acts 10:34-43) and after his resurrection (John 20:19, 21; 20:26). His ministry was a ministry of peace to his people as is evident at his birth when angels announced, “Peace on earth” (Luke 2:14) and during his entrance into Jerusalem when the Jews announced, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest” (Luke 19:38).

Most Jews though did not know that the pathway to peace was the cross and the empty tomb (Luke 19:42). They thought ultimate peace came through a coming King who would defeat their physical enemies – Rome. Israel, however, did not need a mere release from physical captivity; they needed release from a deeper more profound spiritual captivity. The real enemy of God’s people were not the Gentiles, but the demonic forces. Peace, therefore, could only be accomplished through Jesus’ death. The good news is that this peace has been won and has been preached to the Jews, the Ephesian Gentiles, and to us.

*“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest”  
(Luke 19:38).*



Church family, on June 30th, California recorded nearly 10,000 new coronavirus cases. This is alarming. Now, although we are not all suffering to the same degree, we are all suffering because of this virus. Discouragement is a common feeling these days, and sadly, so is depression. This is a normal response to the culture shock that we are all feeling right now.

Church family, we need to remember exactly what Paul is telling the Ephesian church to remember. We need to remember that although we were once far from God, we are now near because of Christ! This is what we must keep our eyes fixed on.

Now, notice something amazing in verse 17. Paul says, “He [Jesus] preached peace to those who were near and to those who were far.” Now, when you look at Jesus’ ministry, he preached predominately to Jews. What does it mean then to say that Jesus preached to the Gentiles – to those who were far? This points us to a significant truth – when God’s people preach the gospel of Jesus, Jesus is preaching. This is the point of the Great Commission. We take the message of Jesus beyond Israel to the uttermost ends of the earth. Luke, the author of Acts, marks several points of similarity between Jesus’ ministry and the ministry of the early church in the book of Acts to explain that the ministry of the church is an extension of the ministry of Jesus.



Church family, when we preach the gospel, our dead world hears the words of Jesus. So let's preach the gospel so that our dead community experiences peace and enters into our church community. Here, they will experience New Creation, the very thing they long for.

## THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IS CHARACTERIZED BY ACCESS (18)

“ *18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

Church family, we have access to the Father. This means that we have the freedom to enter into his presence in peace. Without Christ, access to God is fearful and threatening, but in Christ, access to God is glorious and peaceful. Let's investigate this idea in more detail.

### *The Trinity in New Creation*

We should know about this access is that it is dependent on the Trinity. We see each person of the Trinity operating in our salvation in verse 18. First, Paul tells us that our access is through Jesus (2:18). In other words, Jesus is the one who gives us access to the



Father. Paul has already explained how Jesus does this in verses 13-15 – it is through his blood, his death. This truth underlines again the necessity of Jesus – without him dying for us, we are still far from God.

Second, our access is in the Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit creates the unity we experience in Christ. I think it is very tempting for us to undermine this truth. For example, it is easy to think that our access to God is created by feelings. In other words, when we feel close to God, then we believe that we have access. Brothers and sisters, our access to God is a reality we have because access is 1) through Christ and 2) in the Spirit. Paul says “we have!” He does not say “we sometimes have,” “we might have,” or “we will have.” Our access to God is a present reality that results from the work of the Son and the Spirit!

Third, our access is to the Father. The Father is the one who sent the Son to accomplish the mission of redemption (John 3:16; 1 John 4:14), and because of the Son and the Spirit, we now have access to the Father.

We see, then, that each member of the Trinity plays a specific role in our salvation and in the formation of the Christian community.



## *New Creation: A Return from Exile*

We must also know that the proclamation that we have access to the Father is a declaration of New Creation. Ever since Genesis 3, we have been exiled from God's presence. Jews in the OT had limited access to God. The norm was that access was only permitted once a year by one person on a day called the day of atonement. Gentiles had no access to God. This is one of the devastating effects of sin – it separates us from God. Thus, when Paul says, “we have access” to the Father, he has just said something significant. This statement is the proclamation of a new era; an era that is no longer defined by the rebellious act of Adam, but one that is defined by the obedient act of Jesus who is the new and better Adam. Adam represented all of humanity in himself and lead us to hell through his act of disobedience. Jesus, however, represents new humanity so that everyone hidden in him is lead to New Creation. In Christ, we have returned from our spiritual exile back into the presence of God!

### THE GLORIOUS NEW RELATIONSHIP (19)

“ *19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,*



Because Jesus came to make peace and preached peace, a glorious new relationship exists. The Ephesians are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens and members of God's house. Paul here describes the Ephesians relationship to God, first, in terms of citizenship, and second, he describes it with familial language. This is our God. He loves to take the foreigners and make them citizens; he loves to make the orphaned his children. Because the Father sent the Son, because the Son accomplished redemption, and because the Spirit convicts us of sin and leads us to Christ, we are no longer dead, but alive; we are no longer far but near; we are no longer orphaned, we are children.

## THE GLORIOUS NEW REALITY (20-22)

“*20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

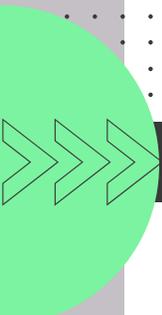


Because of our Trinitarian God, the church exists as a new reality. In verses, 20-22, Paul describes the church as the temple of God. Jesus is the cornerstone of this temple (21). The cornerstone is the most important stone of a structure. This image indicates that the whole structure depends on Jesus. The apostles and the prophets are the foundation since they are the ones who first preached the gospel and God's revelation after Jesus. Finally, the Ephesian Church is the structure built on foundation and cornerstone.

Unity is essential to our growth as the temple of God. Paul makes this point in verse 21 and 22. He uses the phrases "joined together" (21) and "built together" (22). When the people of God are grounded on Jesus, people from various backgrounds are joined together to form the very temple of God. This is the work that the Spirit accomplishes (22).

Church family, the Spirit makes a community of people – called one new man and New Creation – who are united in Christ amid God-glorifying diversity. If we work against this reality, we are working against God the Spirit because he is the one who makes this new temple (22). Church family, when we smash diversity for the sake of unity, we work against God. We do this most often when we simply fail to consider others. For example, when someone from a different background

tells you something you said hurt them, defense smashes diversity for the sake of unity. Moreover, when we smash unity for diversity, we work against God. This happens often in society. Our society tells us that the pathway to reconciliation among different cultures is to learn about the differences. This is wrong. The pathway to reconciliation is to learn, to respect, and to appreciate the differences, but, more than that, the pathway is to know that differences exist among unity. The Spirit has created us as a community united in Christ amid God-glorifying diversity. Let's live in this.



## CONCLUSION

Church family, our community is characterized by peace, and this is a sign that we live in New Creation. Our society longs for this, so let's show this world the reality of the church. We are people united to Father, in the Spirit, through the Son. Therefore, let's respect, appreciate, and love the diverse cultural backgrounds represented in our church while rejoicing that we are all equal because we all – all who trust in Jesus – are in Christ.

### *Lets's Pray*

God, please help us this week to live as new creation for your glory. Our world needs to see new creation; they desperately need to see this. Help us to live out the reality that we are new creation for your glory, amen.