

A. Introduction — scripture reading Ephesians 2:14-18
1. historical background^A

B. A New Peace Replaces the Old Hostility 2:14-15
1. Christ our Peace^B

2. prerequisite to peace

3. Christ abolish the law?^C

4. How is it abolished^D

5. What was abolished^E

^A Acts 21:27-31

^B John 14:27

^C Matthew 5:17, 19:8

^D Colossians 2:13-14

^E Romans 1–3, 3:23, Galatians 3:22

6. the result is ...

C. A New Access Replaces the Old Separation 2:16-18

1. verse 16: the next step is ...

2. verse 17: news so important it must be ...^F

3. verse 18: access
a. its provision^G

b. its privilege

c. its purpose

D. Conclusion ... because this is true it means that I ...

^F Matthew 28:19-20

^G Ephesians 2:6

A. Introduction

1. Mergers & Acquisitions (“M&A”)

- a. when I worked in insurance, this was a major activity
- b. essentially, I worked for one company all my business life
 - (A) but this included working with some of our subsidiaries
 - (B) at one point my company sent me to be the actuary of a subsidiary insurance company they were selling
 - (C) then my new parent company turned around and bought my original company and moved me there as the actuary – so for me this was a friendly takeover
- c. but often acquisitions, takeovers, mergers are not friendly
 - (A) they are hostile; between fierce competitors
 - (B) if in the merging companies there is a new culture then the merger may work; if not, it probably will not
- d. in our scripture reading today we find that God has in Jesus Christ, brought a merger between two hostile groups: Jew and Gentile creating a new nature, a new humanity as part of reconciliation between Himself and mankind ...

2. Scripture reading « Ephesians 2:14–18 (NRSV) »

3. The background to this passage of scripture – John R. W. Stott has admirably portrayed the picture that lays behind Paul’s words in this passage—{2}.

- a. Of this double Gentile alienation—from God and from God's people Israel the so-called ‘middle wall of partition’ (verse 14, AV) or ‘dividing wall of hostility’ (RSV) was the standing symbol. It was a notable feature of the magnificent temple built in Jerusalem by Herod the Great. The temple building itself was constructed on an elevated platform. Round it was the Court of the Priests. East of this was the Court of Israel, and further east the court of the women. These three courts — for the priests, the lay men and the lay women of Israel respectively — 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. This was a spacious court running right round the temple and its inner courts. From any part of it the Gentiles could look up and view the temple, but were not allowed to approach it. They were cut off from it by the surrounding wall, which was a one-and-a-half metre stone barricade, on which were displayed at intervals warning notices in Greek and Latin. They read, in effect, not 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' but 'Trespassers will be executed.'

- b. The famous Jewish historian Josephus describes this barricade in both his books. In his Antiquities he writes that the temple was 'encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death.'^A In his Wars of the Jews he is a little more explicit. There was, he writes, '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 law of purity, some in Greek and some in Roman letters, that "no foreigner should go within that sanctuary".'^B
- c. During the last hundred years or so two of the Greek notices have been discovered, one in 1871 and the other in 1935. The former, exhibited in the museum at Istanbul, is a white limestone slab measuring nearly a metre across. Its exact wording is as follows: '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.' Paul knew all about it from personal experience. Only about three years previously he had nearly been lynched himself by an angry Jewish mob who thought he had taken a Gentile with him into the temple, interestingly enough an Ephesian named Trophimus.^C
- d. This, then, is the historical, social and religious back-ground to Ephesians 2. Although all human beings are alienated from God because of sin, the Gentiles were also alienated from the people of God. And worse even than this double alienation (of which the temple wall was a symbol) was the active 'enmity' or 'hostility' (echthra) into which it continuously erupted — enmity between man and God, and enmity between Gentiles and Jews.

^A Antiquities, XV.11.5

^B Wars of the Jews, V.5.2

^C Acts 21:27-31

e. The grand theme of Ephesians 2, highlighted in today's text, is that Jesus Christ has destroyed both enmities.

4. let us look at these verses under the following themes:

- a. a New Peace Replaces the Old Hostility
- b. a New Access Replaces the Old Separation

B. A New Peace Replaces the Old Hostility Ephesians 2:14-15

1. 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*, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

2. Christ our Peace

a. The emphasis is on the pronoun, 'He'

(A) it is He and no other

(B) it is He in His own Person

(C) It is not only that the peace was made by Christ and ranks as His achievement, but that it is so identified with him that were He away it would also fail, – so dependent on Him that apart from Him we cannot have it. And He is thus for us 'the Peace'. –^{3}.

b. 'Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.' – John 14:27 – there can be no true peace without Jesus Christ, Messiah, Prince of Peace

3. but for there to be peace in any merger

a. there has to be a change in nature and / or culture of the merging parties – but that is what God does in Christ

b. when Paul wrote this letter that temple barrier still stood

(A) it would be later in 70 AD when it would be destroyed along with Jerusalem before Rome's armies

(B) but the wall was a symbol: the hostility it represented was demolished in Jesus Christ

- c. Paul defines this enmity as 'the law of commandments *contained in ordinances*', so that for the hostility to be abolished, the law must needs be abolished
4. yet how could this be in Christ?
- a. for Jesus said, 'Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.' (Matthew 5: 17)
 - b. one approach to this problem is to the OT law into its three constituent parts
 - (A) 1. God's moral law which has never been abolished and is enjoined upon believers
 - (B) 2. the national or social law that was given in relation to the land such as property, inheritance, and so on. It must be noted that some of these laws were permissive rather than compulsive; such a law was that of divorce where Jesus said, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.' (Matthew 19: 8). With the subjugation of the Jews from the exile onward these laws were in effect only insofar as they were allowed by the foreign rulers
 - (C) 3. the ceremonial law which formed but shadows and types of the reality that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ; the book of Hebrews is an exposition on this subject
 - (D) this approach would say that item 3 was abolished
 - (E) but this fails to remove the hostility from the other two items, and particularly the first, God's moral law, wherein the real source of hostility is exposed: sin
 - c. so let us examine for a moment HOW the hostility was abolished and from that see WHAT was the law abolished
5. the HOW is given: 'by abolishing in His flesh the hostility'
- a. that phrase, 'in His flesh' could be taken to refer to His incarnation in its entirety from the cradle to the grave
 - (A) and His spotless, sinless life was certainly a part of it
 - (B) but the next verse focusses specifically on the cross
 - (C) Christ did this 'in His crucified flesh' – in His atoning death on the cross, enmity barrier was destroyed
 - b. it was not just a single barrier in the temple that is symbolic but there were a succession of barriers

- (A) to the Holy of Holies where the High Priest only could enter and that only annually
 - (B) the court of the priests where only priests could go
 - (C) places reserved for the service of the Levites
 - (D) the court of the Israelites restricted to Israelite men
 - (E) the court of the women
 - (F) all these were barriers of hostility; separating mankind one from each other and from God
- c. so now, turn over a few pages in your Bibles to Colossians 2 where we have an abbreviated yet clarifying version of the truth we have been discovering in Ephesians 2:
- (A) *'When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.'* (Colossians 2:13-14 NAS)
 - (B) it was the crucified flesh of Jesus Christ
 - (1) that body nailed to the cross
 - (2) the vicarious – substitutionary – execution death of Jesus Christ – his being punished for our sins – that delivers us from the hostility of *'the law of commandments contained in ordinances'*
6. so WHAT was the law that was abolished
- a. it is that law of God
 - (A) whether as expressed in the OT as from Moses
 - (B) or extended in the OT under the prophets
 - (C) or applied by Jesus Christ in His teaching and in a very special way in the Sermon on the Mount
 - (D) or the words of the apostles
 - b. under which we find ourselves lost, condemned sinners
 - c. this is the law which as explained in Romans 1 to 3 finds us every one, Jew and Gentile, sinners accountable to God

7. that is the hostility that has been destroyed – the judgement of God’s holy law ever burdening us with guilt – so we have peace
 - a. so from this base of peace
 - b. God creates the new man (or humanity)
 - c. not consisting of all mankind
 - d. but that man, that body, that constitutes the true church – whether you consider it on a local church basis or on a world wide basis – who have Jesus Christ as their Peace
 - e. and on this basis we discover

C. A New Access Replaces the Old Separation Ephesians 2:16-18

1. ... 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.
2. in verse 16 we encounter the next step in the merger
 - a. ‘and might reconcile them both in one body to God’
 - b. having taken care of the cause of hostility
 - (A) the separation created by the law of commandments
 - (B) the guilt that falls on breaking but a single law
 - c. and having provided that inner result of peace
 - (A) not a peace founded on faulty treaties of men
 - (B) but one founded on the priceless person of Christ
 - d. the positive step is taken of
 - (A) not only reconciling the warring parties to each other
 - (B) but, more importantly, that together as a new body, the church of Christ, they are reconciled to God
3. is this important – it certainly is, for in verse 17, we find
 - a. it was so important that the Son of God himself came to preach this peace, a peace that was not only

- for those near (the Jews) but a peace for those far away (Gentiles)
- b. to some of these Jesus preached peace in person
 - c. to others through His disciples and those who followed
 - d. and today, through every believer as he or she carries out the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20
 - e. the gospel message is the message of peace, a message that this world; your world; my world desperately needs today
4. on the final verse, 18, 'we both have our access' let us consider
- a. the provision of this access
 - b. the privilege of this access
 - c. the purpose of this access
5. the provision of this access to God the Father involves the other two Persons of the Triune God
- a. this access is provided through Jesus Christ
 - (A) it is by means of our union with Christ that results from His being our Saviour
 - (B) as we saw a few verses ago in Ephesians 2:6 that is why we are seated with him in the heavenly places
 - (C) by being clothed in His righteousness we can enter
 - b. this access is provided in the Holy Spirit
 - (A) the Holy Spirit not only does a cleansing work in us
 - (B) but He also does a comforting work for us; when we do what is God's will to pray, or cannot express our prayer in words, He does this on our behalf
6. the privilege of this access to God the Father is shown by
- a. the unworthy character of us who receive it
 - b. the cost at which it was given
 - (A) it cost the Son of God the emptying of Himself
 - (B) by which He was Incarnate; made man
 - (C) obedient man, even to death

- (D) even the ignominious, criminal death on the cross
- c. the blessing that flow out of it
 - (A) there are the blessings of casting away of our cares, of answered prayers, of fellowship with God,
 - (B) but the ultimate blessing is the transforming of our minds to be akin to his, to be willing His will as ours
- d. the value set upon it by God's people of every age

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!

That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.

In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!^{4}.

- e. what a privilege is this access given to God's children!

7. the purpose of this access to God the Father

- a. of course when we hear that word access we think of prayer, of making our needs and petitions known
- b. but access is the prerequisite not only of prayer but of praise – access – entrance into the throne-room of God – is necessary for our worship
- c. access means that our songs and hymns of worship this morning did more than simply bounce off the windows, walls and ceiling; they joined a great chorus of praise from voices and hearts around the world to that of angels in the heavens to proclaim the glory of God

D. Conclusion

1. God has a purpose of peace for mankind

- a. in Christ he has provided that the hostility resulting from sin should be brought to an end
- b. in the church, the true church of true believers that are the spiritual life in any local church, God has

forged a new humanity, from which He desires that all the old hostility arising from race, nationality, gender, and so on be purged

- c. that this new humanity might have the fellowship with Him for which the old humanity was designed in Eden's garden

2. Elizabeth Barrett Browning^{5}.

- a. and her love for Robert Browning was the subject of play, 'The Barretts of Wimpole Street' in the early days of TV
- b. One of the poems coming out of their courtship begins, 'How do I love thee? Let me count the ways ...' – it's fun, of course, to pause at this point as if trying to think of one
- c. Elizabeth married Robert against her parents wishes
- d. so the Barretts cut themselves completely off for the couple
- e. yet, for years, on a week by week basis, Elizabeth wrote to her parents heart-moving letters of her love for them
- f. after years, a box arrived from her parents and Elizabeth was filled with joy ... until she opened the box and found in it all of the letters she had sent; not one ever opened

3. How sad it is

- a. when God has written his love-letter telling how He has eternal life for all who believe – and people reject His offer
- b. when God purposes that His children have immediate, ever access to Himself – and they think an hour a week enough
- c. BUT, how blessed it is when a child of God knows His heavenly Father so well that whatever comes along, he or she can say with complete assurance, 'it is well with my soul'

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Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick's database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. ‘God’s New Society - The Message of Ephesians’ by John R. W. Stott, page 91f, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois 60515; 1979.
3. Expositor’s Greek Testament, *in loc*
4. ‘Sweet Hour of Prayer’ by William W. Walford, (1752-1850)
5. Some of this taken from Kerux illustration #31886