

Christ Is Our Peace

September 10 – Ephesians 2:11-22

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Day 252 – 113 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul often wrote about the mysteries of our faith. One of those mysteries was the unification of Jews and Gentiles. **At one time, these groups were bitter enemies, but now, through Christ, they have been made one body — the Church.** Let's consider this mystery a little more closely.

Previously, the phrase "God's people" referred only to the Jews because they inherited the covenant promises of Abraham. The physical mark of that covenant was circumcision (v.11). Those who were not of the covenant were, of course, uncircumcised and, therefore, shunned by the Jews. Only the Jews were God's chosen nation. Anyone else was considered a "stranger to the covenants of promise" (v.12).

Thus, a great deal of animosity existed between Jews and Gentiles. **But God, who had reconciled sinners to Himself through Christ, also reconciled Gentiles and Jews into one body.** Once, the title of "God's People" referred to the Jews only, but now it refers to Christ-followers. As both Jews and Gentiles have had their sins forgiven in Christ, their new identity is in Him.

Next, Paul described the Gentiles' new standing in Christ with three metaphors — citizenship, family, and a temple. First, Paul wrote that they were "no longer strangers and aliens but fellow citizens with the saints" (v.19). Just as Roman citizens enjoyed privileges and protections, so also do we as citizens of heaven enjoy both immediate and future privileges (Eph. 1:3-23).

Second, Paul described this new union as God's house (2:19). As Christians, Gentiles have been adopted into God's family (1:5). Belonging to a family has its benefits. We are no longer orphans. We have a loving Father in heaven who protects us and provides for our needs. We are given an inheritance. We have siblings (beginning with Christ) who care for us. We are not without hope or help. We have loved ones in the faith who are equipped and ready to assist.

Paul described God's house as being built on a foundation (2:20). The foundation is Christ. He is the cornerstone, the chief or first stone that was laid. After Christ laid the first stone, God used others to build around Him, namely the apostles, prophets, and Disciples.

The third metaphor Paul used was a temple, the "whole building being fitted together" (2:21). The Romans built temples in several cities of their empire; and, of course, the Temple of God was in Jerusalem. God is everywhere, of course, but it was in that Temple that He chose to manifest His presence (Old Testament).

However, that Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. So then, where does God manifest His presence today? He indwells His followers and the collective body of the Church. Each believer is a "living stone" that God has added to His new temple (1 Pet. 2:5), and His building will not be completed until every stone that He has called has been added (2 Pet. 3:9).

Daily Reflection

Inside the Church, there is no place for barriers, inequalities, or segregations. Christ fulfilled the Law and introduced a New Covenant in His body and put to death the hostility between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:15). **Jesus not only made peace, but He is our peace. No hostility should exist between His followers** (v.17, 18). Perhaps this is one application of His title, "Prince of Peace."

The cross is God's answer to ending all hostility that exists between men. Discrimination, segregation, bigotry in all its forms, and any other strife can be conquered in Christ. **None of these hostilities should exist in the Church, for God's people should live in peace and unity.** The prejudices, biases, and injustices that so often plague the nations of men are a result of their fallen nature. That nature can be made new in Christ, in whom all men are viewed as equals.

A Prisoner of Christ

September 11 – Ephesians 3:1-21

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Today in Your Reading

Paul explained the role that he has played in making known the mystery of the gospel, as well as the persecution he has experienced as a result. **He wrote *Ephesians* while in prison, but he wanted them to know that it was his calling and pleasure to fulfill his mission (3:1, 2, 13).**

After reviewing the mystery of the Gentiles' inclusion in the gospel (v.1-6), Paul described his role as a preacher of the gospel. It was a privilege, he said (v.7-12). Though he viewed himself as the "very least of the saints," because of his background, he understood God's purpose in choosing him. To become a great preacher after having been a great persecutor produces a great testimony. Besides, he was honored to "bring to light the unfathomable riches of Christ" (v.8, 9).

Thus, **Paul did not want his readers to pity him but to celebrate with him.** "His tribulations were for their glory" or honor (v.13). He also wanted the Ephesians to know that he was praying for them (v.14-20). What was he praying?

First, he prayed that they would "be strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner man" (v.16). Though our bodies experience frailties and weaknesses, our souls (the inner man) can grow stronger through the power of His Spirit. We must not focus on our temporal body but rather on our eternal soul, participating in those activities that encourage its maturation (worship, prayer, Scripture intake, service, etc.).

Second, Paul prayed that "Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith" (v.17). With the power of God's Spirit in the inner man, Christ takes up residence in the hearts of all believers. While Christ desires to invade every room and closet of our hearts, we are often reluctant to allow Him into all places. It is important for us to "practice His presence" in our lives, to recognize the fact that He is always with us.

Third, Paul prayed that the Ephesians "may be able to comprehend... the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (v.19, 20). But can we comprehend the love of Christ, a love that surpasses all knowledge? While this request is earnest, it is impossible. No one could ever understand the vastness or completeness of the love of God. However, God's love for us is so vast that we could explore and experience it the rest of our lives and never reach its end.

Finally, Paul prayed that his readers would be "filled up to all the fullness of God" (v.19). Here again is another sincere but impossible request. No man, other than Christ, can experience the fullness of God. However, what Paul may be praying here is that God would fill up what each saint makes available to Him. While a cup can be filled to the brim with ocean water, it does not contain the entire ocean. As we empty ourselves of sin and selfishness and become more fully devoted to the Lord, His Spirit can do more than "we could ever ask or think" (v.20).

Daily Reflection

I love that Paul refers to himself as a "prisoner of Christ" (3:1) rather than a prisoner of Rome or of the Jews. He didn't call himself a prisoner of Caesar or Herod. Why not? Before one is imprisoned, he must be captured and taken into custody. **Paul viewed his life as captured by Christ, not taken by force, but surrendered.**

Second, though the term *prisoner* is most often negative, **Paul viewed it as a badge of honor (v.13).** While many might view life in prison or life as a slave as the lowest of existence, Paul regarded it as the highest level of living.

Third, **a prisoner's life is in the hands of his captor.** Whatever happens to him is a result of the decision of his arrestor. Thus, for Paul to call himself a prisoner of Christ meant he viewed prison as part of God's plan or purposes for him.

Wow! Are we worthy prisoners of Christ?

A Worthy Walk

September 12 – Ephesians 4:1-6

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Today in Your Reading

For three chapters, Paul reminded the Ephesians of what God had done for them. For the next three chapters (4-6), Paul explained how God expected them to live, knowing what He had done. Notice the word *therefore* at the start of this section (4:1). This pivotal term highlights Paul's shift from doctrine to duty, from principle to practice. Often, believers want to know the practical steps of the Christian life. But before right practice comes right teaching. Without knowing the reasons why we do what we do (motives), our actions are meaningless motions.

Having said that, Paul set the stage for the second half of his letter by writing, "I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (4:1). This challenge was the springboard for everything that follows. In essence, he was entreating his readers to live a life that honored the Lord. Since He had predestined them, chosen them, called them, saved them, sanctified them, reconciled them, and equipped them, Paul pleaded with them to live for Him.

The first suggestion Paul provided, to walk in a worthy manner, was to "be diligent to preserve the unity" of the church (v.3), "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Keep in mind that the Lord is the One who reconciled Jews and Gentiles into one body (2:16; 3:6). It is He who afforded this unity through the blood of Christ.

However, though God obtained this unity, it is our responsibility to maintain it. Believers of different backgrounds, nationalities, ethnicities, and personalities living together peacefully is not an easy task. The church is not made of perfect people. Every member has a saint's heart with sinful flesh, which is bound to create problems that need to be overcome with Christian character or the fruit of the Spirit.

Daily Reflection

To preserve the unity and peace of the church, Paul offered several characteristics that must be demonstrated — humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love (v.2). It is a shame for God's people to quarrel, to split into factions, or to encourage disunity. A divided church is an ineffective church. How can a squabbling body of believers edify one another, much less appeal to or impact those outside its walls? Peaceless churches, with constant internal conflict, will exhibit little to no positive external influence. They are a disgrace to the work and purposes of Christ. **We must collectively "walk in a manner worthy of our calling."**

After all that God has done for us, it would not make sense to live for ourselves, to live to please others, to remain habitually trapped in sin, or to chase after the desires of the flesh or of this world. That would be to walk in an unworthy manner. **Our lives should be a clear reflection of the work of Christ.**

For that reason, Paul reminded us that as followers of Christ, though we are different and distinct, we are "one body in Him, having one Spirit to guide us, one hope of our calling (salvation and eternal life), one Lord (Jesus Christ), one faith (essential doctrines), one baptism (could refer to water or spiritual baptism), having one God and Father" (v.4-6).

Though we are many, we are one. Though we are different, we are one. Though we are unique, we are one. Though we may have conflicting ideas, opinions, or interests, we look past our selfish inclinations to see and attain that which is for the good of the whole. We sacrifice selfish passions, preferences, and prejudices to find and build on common ground. We emphasize our commonness, those things that bring us together, instead of dying on hills that divide us. **That is a church that "walks in a manner worthy of its calling."**

Equipping the Saints

September 13 – Ephesians 4:7-16

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Today in Your Reading

Paul has transitioned from explaining what God had done for the Ephesians in salvation to how they were to live, “to walk in a manner worthy of their calling” (v.1). The first suggestion he made was to preserve the unity of the church (v.3). Next, Paul shared his second suggestion.

“To each one of us grace was given” (v.7). This grace is referring to spiritual gifts. The gifts are included with our salvation. They are like spoils given to the friends of a conquering King who fulfilled all things through His death, resurrection, and ascension to the throne of heaven (v.8-10).

God has blessed the church with “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers,” who are divinely equipped for ministering the Word of God and propagating the gospel (v.11). The term *apostles* refers to those who had spent time with or seen Jesus and who were sent by Him to accomplish a certain task. This group would have included the Twelve Disciples and Paul. Apostles in that sense no longer exist.

Likewise, the prophets of today are not the same as former prophets. The prophets in the Old and New Testaments spoke directly from God. Their words or revelatory messages were added to the Scriptures. But now, the Scriptures are complete. Therefore, prophets of that category no longer exist. The gift of prophecy today is that of exhorting, encouraging, or challenging others with the words of God that we already have in the Bible.

The purpose of God’s assigning believers with spiritual gifts is to “equip the saints for the work of service and for building up the body of Christ” (v.12). While our gifts can certainly be used outside of the church, they are given to encourage believers’ spiritual growth (v.13). It is a common misconception that pastors are the only ones who minister to the church, when the Bible states that all of us are ministers. **Pastors**

are to “equip the saints for the work of service.” They are not to minister service to the saints alone. Every member of the body is a minister. Every member is gifted, and every believer has a part to play in the work of the church (v.16).

Daily Reflection

How do we know when the saints are equipped?

“We will no longer be as children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine or by the trickery, craftiness, or schemes of men” (v.14). God’s people should never be victims of the world’s lies, doctrines, or philosophies. We should be able to stand firm in our faith though the world’s winds and waves rage against us. Immature and ill-equipped believers fall prey to its deceptions. Sadly, as the church has compromised its biblical fidelity, more believers are becoming casualties in the war against the world.

Mature, equipped Christians, who are grounded in their faith and who grasp the truths of God’s Word, will be prepared to “speak the truth in love” to those who differ (v.15). Ambassadors for Christ can articulate their faith, even combat the false claims of the world, in a way that is gracious and kind, maintaining relationships with the lost without turning them away.

How have the gifted men and women of your church equipped you for the work of ministry?

How are you using your gifts to equip others?

New Life, New Lifestyle

September 14 – Ephesians 4:17-32

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Today in Your Reading

Paul continued his teaching on how we should “walk in a manner worthy of our calling” (v.1). **Our lives in Christ should reflect a genuine change from the old self to the new.** We should “no longer walk as Gentiles,” meaning that our worldly thoughts, characteristics, and behavior should fall away (v.17).

Because they reject God, those who are lost have hardened hearts, having become darkened in their understanding (v.18). They are callous to morality and righteousness. Therefore, they have “given themselves over to every kind of impurity” (v.19). Their shameful behavior is unbridled and insatiable. They constantly remove God’s boundaries and are indifferent to the consequences. Such indecent behavior is not suitable for a follower of Christ.

Next, Paul shared the opposite lifestyle of a Christian, by saying, “You did not learn Christ in this way” (v.20, 21). **When a person is saved, his life is changed.** That change becomes evident in time, some sooner than later. A renewed heart reveals itself in a renewed mind, which in turn reveals itself in renewed thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions (v.23, 24). The old self is replaced with the new. **The new life we have in Christ should be visible to others.**

First, Paul said that Christians “lay aside falsehood and speak truth” (v.25). **It is not befitting a believer to be dishonest.** For we have the Spirit of truth in us, therefore truth should bubble out of us. We will desire to live a life of integrity, not deception.

Second, **Christians practice self-control, even when angry** (v.26). Anger is not always sinful. Jesus got angry, yet He did not sin. It is acceptable for us to get angry over injustice, wrongdoing, or evil, but we must be careful not to lose control or to allow our anger to boil over into other harmful actions. Thus, Paul wrote, “Be angry but do not sin” (v.31).

We must resolve anger as soon as possible. “Do not let the sun go down on your anger,” Paul wrote (v.26). Otherwise, anger “gives the devil an opportunity” (v.27). The enemy uses our anger to get a foothold in our lives, which may lead to future sinful deeds. It is always best for us to idle our motor before we strip our gears. The best way to resolve anger is through forgiveness, for God has forgiven us (v.32).

Third, **God’s people do not steal.** Rather we share (v.28). We do not take. We give. Stealing is a self-centered act. Sharing is selfless. Stealing is of the devil. Sharing is of God.

Fourth, **Christians speak only what is kind, true, and necessary** (v.25, 29; Prov. 3:3, 4). Before we speak any words, put them through this test. Are they kind, meaning wholesome, edifying, and gracious? Are they true? Are they necessary, meaning appropriate “for the need of the moment”? Not everything we think needs to be said aloud. Words are powerful. They can cause people to stand or stoop, depending on whether they are helpful or harsh. Our words should “give grace to those who hear.”

Unfortunately, our actions and words often “grieve the Holy Spirit” (v.30). The Spirit of God, who indwells us, hears everything we say, sees everything we do, and is saddened by many of the things we force Him to endure (1 Pet. 3:7). We must strive “to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (5:10).

Daily Reflection

How are you doing in these four areas — honesty, anger, stealing, and choosing your words? Is there anything that you are thinking, saying, or doing that grieves the Holy Spirit? If you are in Christ, then you are a new creature. Like shedding old rags for new clothes, your old self has been replaced by a new one, which reflects the righteousness and holiness of Christ (v.24). **In Him your old self has died, and in Him your new self has risen!**

Children of Light

September 15 – Ephesians 5:1-14

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Today in Your Reading

Though translators have lumped the first two verses of this passage into Chapter 5, it could be argued that they belong in the previous chapter. Learning how to be kind, tender-hearted, and loving is difficult, especially when someone has hurt you or made you angry (4:31, 32). However, Paul challenged his readers to “imitate God and walk in love” (as He is love), and to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us. The Christ-like thing to do is to sacrifice our pride instead of crucifying others for their actions or words.

Next, Paul explained the fact that since we have laid aside our old self, and we have put on the new self, we have a new life and should exhibit a new lifestyle as well (4:17-32). For example, there should not be a mention of sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among God’s people (5:3). Neither should we use foul language, foolish talk, or dirty jokes (v.4). Paul suggested that we replace these things with words of thankfulness, focusing on what is positive rather than what is negative (4:29).

Paul took his admonishment one step further, by reminding the Ephesians that those who practice such things give evidence that they have not been saved (5:5). He was not suggesting that Christians can lose their salvation or that those who have lived a shameful lifestyle cannot get saved. What Paul was saying is that this type of living will not be (or should not be) the norm for believers. If someone says he is a Christian, yet has no problem living an immoral lifestyle, then that is evidence against his conversion. For those who are genuinely changed by Christ will express that change by their words and deeds.

However, the world is deceptive (v.6), and it makes these sins, especially sexual sins, look attractive and normal. But Paul challenged his readers not to be deceived and to refuse participation in their deeds (v.7).

Daily Reflection

The things the world does are the “deeds of darkness” and we, as followers of Christ, are “children of light” (v.8). What we do and what we say should clash with the lost world, for “the fruit of the light is goodness and righteousness and truth” (v.9). We do what pleases the Lord (v.10), not what pleases the god of this world.

It is our wholesome lifestyle that sets us apart from the world. We stand out as bright spots in our darkened workplaces, neighborhoods, campuses, organizations, and teams. When we shine that light, it causes others to notice, and it provides opportunities for us to speak of the truth (Matt. 5:14-16). **The problem is that many Christians are not bright enough.** They look too much like the darkened world, and when the world sees us doing and saying the things that they do, then they notice nothing different. **The most treacherous weapon against Christianity is Christians who claim to be followers of Christ but who deny Him by the way they live.**

The last few verses of this section are harsh (v.11-14). Paul challenged those in the church to flush out those who are living like double agents. “Don’t participate with them but rather expose them, for the things that they are doing are disgraceful” (v.11). One of the reasons for dead or sleepy churches is that sins are hidden there, and they need to be brought into the light. **Children of light do not play around with or participate in the deeds of darkness.**

What is your relationship with the deeds of darkness? Is it consistent with the fact that you claim to be a child of light? Explain.

Under the Influence

September 16 – Ephesians 5:15-21

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Day 258 – 107 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul just finished comparing the lifestyle of a follower of Christ to the lifestyle of a worldly lost person (5:3-14). To summarize, he described the difference as he would night and day, as we are of the light, and they are of the darkness. Our passage today continued this train of thought, **as our lives are influenced by something or Someone much different.**

Paul began by saying, "Be careful how you walk (or live), not as unwise men but as wise..." (v.15). It is unwise to live like the world but wise to live a life that pleases the Lord (v.10). Of course, learning how to please the Lord would entail reading His Word and obeying His instructions. As the Creator and Giver of life, it is best (certainly wise) to live life as He instructs. His boundaries, though they may seem unfair or restrictive, exist for our good and His glory. To adhere to them is wise indeed. It is the fool who ignores, rejects, or defies them.

Next, Paul exhorted the Ephesian Christians to "make the most of their time, for the days are evil" (v.16). Making the most of our time could certainly refer to our day, but in the context of the letter, it seems to refer to our life. Paul is saying, "Don't waste your life, distracted by the things of this depraved world, but rather glorify God in how you live, using the short time that you have on earth to accomplish His ends." He wrote, "Understand what the will of the Lord is," instead of being foolish (v.17).

Paul was not encouraging believers to strain to find God's will for every little thing in life (i.e., what to wear today), but rather to understand the purpose of life in general and how He desires for us to live it. "Walk in a manner worthy of your calling," he wrote (4:1). "Be imitators of God" (5:1) and "walk as children of light" (5:8). Thus, he added, "Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (5:17).

Daily Reflection

Because the days are evil, and we should make the most of our time, Paul encouraged his readers to "be filled with the Holy Spirit," instead of getting drunk with wine (v.18). He used a negative worldly experience (getting drunk) to describe a positive godly one (being filled with the Spirit). When one gets drunk, he allows something else to influence and control his thoughts, words, and actions (which Paul called dissipation or debauchery). **When one is filled with the Spirit, he allows God to influence and control his thoughts, words, and actions, therefore thinking, speaking, and doing those things that would honor Him (v.19, 20).**

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is different than the indwelling of the Spirit. When one gives his life to Christ, the Spirit of God indwells him. Every believer has the Spirit within him. **Being filled with the Spirit refers to one allowing the Spirit to direct all that he does.** While all Christians have the Spirit living within them, a minority of them allow the Spirit to influence them on a regular basis. To be filled with the Spirit, one must feed on God's Word, yield himself to His control (Rom. 12:1, 2), pursue a pure life, confess and put away all known sin (1 Jn. 1:5-9), daily die to self (Lk. 9:23), surrender to God's will, and depend on His power for all things (Gal. 5:16-25).

When believers allow the Spirit to control their lives, there are immediate changes, referring to all that Paul has mentioned so far, but also referring to what he mentioned next (5:20, 21). **Christians under the influence of the Spirit will first be full of praise, positive encouraging words instead of a demeaning, negative attitude. They will give thanks for all things instead of always complaining. They will also be "submissive to one another in love,"** which Paul expanded in the next passage (5:21-6:9).

We are all under the influence of something or someone. What is it that influences you most?

