

Did Jesus Bring Peace on Earth?

Ephesians 2:11-22

INTRODUCTION

A. The announcement of peace (“on earth peace” – Lk 2:14)

1. How was it delivered? – A very familiar Bible passage has an announcement angels made to shepherds about peace. It’s preached and it’s sung annually at Christmas. It’s Luke 2:8-14 – most spoken by just one angel, the last verse by a whole group of angels. Note, by the way, that this whole announcement was **SPOKEN, NOT SUNG**. Many of the carols and hymns that are sung around Christmas falsely claim that the angels sang. Nowhere does the Bible say that.

2. What was declared? The last verse of the announcement contains an often misunderstood phrase – “on earth peace.” This little phrase has caused confusion and misled millions. Time forbids going into detail here, but one idea that has risen is that Jesus came to earth over 2,000 years ago to make the planet more peaceful. **He didn’t**. It’s true that He did come to bring peace, but it wasn’t for the planet as a whole; it wasn’t a political or military or even a social peace. The passage under consideration now will show us the peace that Jesus DID actually accomplish in His Incarnation.

B. The arrival of peace

1. The peace Jesus accomplished then – The peace that Jesus accomplished at His first coming to earth was internal, NOT external. Moreover, it involved just a portion of mankind, not the whole human race.

2. The passage for us today

- a. New Testament Epistles are a mixture of doctrine and practice – what to **believe**, how to **behave**.
- b. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians deals with these two topics quite nicely; doctrine is mostly in chapters 1-3, with practice in chapters 4-6.
- c. Ephesians 2 has two sections – verses 1-10 deal with God’s work in individuals, while verses 11-22 deal with His work in believers as a group. It is the second section that concerns us today. We can see three main themes in this group of verses: reflection on the past, redemption by the Lord, and relation to the Church.*****

I. Recollection on the past (vv. 11-12) – In the current age of grace in which we live there are (biblically speaking) three groups of human beings: Jews, Gentiles, and the Church of God (1Co 10:32). The existence of these three separate groups is prominent in Ephesians 2 as Paul calls on the Ephesian believers to recall what they were before salvation.

A. Recollection by Gentiles – Paul specifies six things the Gentiles should recall had been missing in their lives.

1. Circumcision (v. 11) – This was the sign (token) of the covenant God made with Abraham and later with Israel. Gentiles, of course, in general knew nothing about this covenant – and thus did not get circumcised in Old Testament times. Here Paul calls Gentiles “the Uncircumcision” – as contrasted with the Jews (who are “the Circumcision”).

2. Christ (v. 12) – The Gentiles had no general or national hope of the coming of a Messiah (Christ).

3. Citizenship (v. 12) – Gentiles (except by marriage) had no part in Israel’s theocratic state – its national or political life. Instead, Paul says, they were

- a. “**Aliens**” (*apallotrioō* – 3x in NT = here, Eph 4:18 & Col 1:23) – indicates those SHUT OUT
- b. “**Strangers**” (also in v. 19 – *xenos* – 14x in NT) – used of temporary, short-term FOREIGNERS

4. Covenants (v. 12) – God’s made covenants with Israel only (see Rom 9:4) – not with Gentiles and not with the Church. We (in the Church), though, do benefit from one of those covenants (the New Covenant) by Christ’s death.

5. Confidence / certainty (v. 12 – “**no hope**” [= expectation of future deliverance]) – In the Old Testament, God gave Israel hope of a future messianic kingdom of peace. Believers today (Jew & Gentile – members of the Church, the Body of Christ) have hope (the Greek word has the idea of a certain expectation) that unsaved Gentiles have always lacked.

6. Creator-Redeemer (v. 12 – “**without God**” – *atheos* – only here in the Bible. In English, atheists are those who deny there is a God; the Greek word can mean that, but also can indicate those living apart from God (the true God), even though they may worship a pantheon of false gods (as did most Gentiles).

B. Recollection by God’s people – By contrast with Gentiles, we should keep in mind what the two different groups of God’s chosen peoples in history are called biblically to recall.

1. The Israelites were the first group historically. We meet them initially, of course, in the Old Testament. There we see that they were to be expected to recall THREE prominent things in their past: their slavery (Dt 16:2), God’s deliverance (1Chr 16:12), and God’s Law (Num 15:39).

2. The Church, on the other hand, is encouraged to remember just ONE thing above all else. It occurred during Jesus’ incarnation as the God-Man. The Bible never encourages (much less requires) believers to celebrate Jesus’ birth, baptism, transfiguration, triumphal entry into Jerusalem, resurrection, or ascension – even though many churches do celebrate some of these events. The one event God wants us to remember – and even commemorate as we meet together – is

His death (“**This do in remembrance of Me.**” (Lk 22:19; 1Cor 11:24,25).

II. Pacification by the Lord (vv. 13-18) – The Ephesian believers (formerly just unsaved Gentiles) had gone from having no Messiah to being “in Christ” (cf., Rom 8:1; 12:5; 16:3,7,9,10; 1Co 1:2,30; 3:1; 4:10,15,17; 15:18,22,31; 16:24, etc.).

A. Four results of Jesus’ work for peace

1. Unity (vv. 13-14) Paul speaks of the unity of the Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ in two ways.

a. Closeness – First, he says that those who were “**far off**” were made (aorist = past tense) “**nigh**.”

b. Oneness – Then in four ways he describes the new unity that Jews and Gentiles have in Christ: =

1) two are “**made both one**” (14), 2) “**of twain one new man**” (15), 3) “**both ... in one body**” (16), and 4) “**both have access by one Spirit**” (18). Paul refers to the “**middle wall**” (*mesotoikon* – only here in the NT) = the “**partition**” (*phragmos* – the Greek word indicating a fence or hedge that prevents people from coming together). This phrase may be an allusion to the inscription in Herod’s temple in Jerusalem that read (in Greek) “No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and the forecourt around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”

The Greek form of the word for “partition” is in the genitive case, and it seems to grammatically be a genitive of apposition or identification, so the translation would be “the middle wall that is the partition.”

John Chrysostom (archbishop of Constantinople ca. A.D. 400) said that it’s not that Christ brought one up to another’s level, but it’s “as if one should melt down one statue of silver and another of lead, and the two together should come out gold.”

2. Liberty (15a – Freedom from the Law – its commands & ceremonies – is one of our freedoms in Christ.)

a. The process – He “**abolished**” (destroyed, did away with, nullified) the Law. Paul says elsewhere [that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” (Rom 10:4) We are not under the Law of Moses (including ceremonies, cities of refuge, crime, economy, food and clothing, holy days, property, restitution, sacrifices, tithing, trials, etc.).

b. The purpose – God purposed to make “one new man.” Of the two Greek words for “new” – *naos* (= new or recent in time) and *kainon* (= new in kind or character, quality) – Paul uses the latter word. God made a totally different group of mankind (the Church) – composed of all types of people, Jews and Gentiles of all nations. So now God sees us believers not as Jews or Gentiles but as believers (Rom 10:12f; Gal 3:28).

3. Harmony (16 – “**reconcile**”) instead of hostility (2Co 5:18-20; Rom 5:10; Col 1:20) – Jesus “**having slain the enmity**” “**by the cross**,” while being Himself slain on that cross. Jesus slew (or killed or executed) the enmity – a rather interesting choice of words. While being executed, Jesus executed! What was the enmity? It was human enmity:

a. With **groups** (v. 14 – between Jews and Gentiles)

b. With **God** – Other passages deal with human enmity with (or hostility against) God.

4. Accessibility (v. 18 “**access**” – *prosegōgē*) – The *prosagogeis* was the official in oriental royal court who conducted visitors into a king’s presence. Jesus cleared believers’ path to God. He is “the way” (Jn 14:6).

B. Three roles of Jesus’ work for peace

1. He personifies peace (v. 14 – “**is our peace**” – “He” is emphatic in verses 14 and 18; Jesus (& He alone) embodies peace as “**prince of peace**” (Isa 9:6) and “**son of peace**” (Lk 10:6).

2. He provided peace (v. 15 – “**making peace**”) – cf. Isa 53:6 (“**punishment needed for our peace was upon Him**”); Col 1:20 (“**having made peace through the blood of His cross**”) How did Jesus do this? Paul says Jesus (at Calvary) “made” (a different Greek word, which is better translated “created”) “one new man” (part of the new unity).

3. He proclaimed peace (v. 17 – “**preached peace**”)

a. The written Word predicted it– “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ... behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation, lowly, and riding upon an ass and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.... He shall speak peace unto the heathen.” (Zec 9:9-10) – “Peace, peace, to *him that is* far off and to *him that is* near, saith the Lord.” (Isa 57:19)

b. The living Word performed it – “Preach” translates the Greek word for “evangelize” (proclaim the good news, the gospel). Paul does not say when this occurred. Jesus, before He died, proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom; but that was not the gospel that the Ephesians heard and trusted. Also, there is no Bible record of Gentiles hearing Him preach between Calvary and His ascension to heaven. So, after “having slain the enmity” “by the cross” (vs. 16), He “came and preached” in and through the Apostles to both Gentiles and Jews (two groups – those that were “far away” from God and those that were by covenant “near”). “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” (v. 18)

III. Characterization of the Church (19-22 = a further elaboration of what Paul had said in verse 13)

A. One community – citizens and family (v. 19 – cf. Php 3:20 = “our citizenship is in heaven”)

1. Unsavd Gentiles – Paul uses two words to describe unsavd Gentiles:

- a. **“Strangers”** (foreigners in general, short-term transients) – also in verse 12
- b. **“Foreigners”** (resident “aliens” who settled in a country of their choice)

2. Savd Gentiles – Paul says that by saving them, God made unsavd Gentiles part of a new country and a new family.

- a. Country (**“fellow citizens”** – *sympolitaí*) – You can see most of the English word “politician” in this Greek word. In theory, politicians in government are supposed to represent the citizens.
- b. Family (members **“of the household of God”**) – Some people refer to a church building as the house of God. Biblically, God’s house (*okeioi* – or household) are people – those whom He has saved (cf. Gal 6:10; 1Ti 5:8).

B. One construction (20-22) From viewing the Church as a community Paul moves to the church as a construction.

1. The idea of a foundation (20 – **“the apostles and prophets”**)

a. The character – The term **“the foundation of”** means “the foundation consisting of.” Thus, we see that the Church’s foundation consisted of **“the apostles and prophets”** (the Greek grammatical construction being the genitive of apposition). b. The order – Paul mentions **“prophets”** after **“apostles”** – just as he does in Eph 3:5 & 4:11). This shows he is NOT referring to Old Testament prophets; the Church did not begin in Old Testament times.

These two groups of men were used by God to start the Church (Eph 4:11; 1Co 12:28-30). They did their part – both in personal leadership as well as in literary publication (as they wrote New Testament books).

c. The corner – Jesus is in a sense a foundation (1Co 3:11) as well as a **“cornerstone.”**

1) The idea of stability – The Greek word here (*akrogōniaios* – actually an adjective) means, literally, “extreme or highest tip of an angle.” The word **“stone”** is not a separate word in the Greek text – but it is understood as being the substance of the corner. There were, of course, stones at each corner of a building, but Jesus is the “chief” or highest (or head) part of the Church – “the capstone or binding stone that holds the whole structure together” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:792). Peter echoes the same idea in saying of Jesus as a stone (*lithos* – a different Greek word) that He was made (not “is made”) “head of corner” (literal translation of 1Pt 2:7).

2) The idea of unity – A corner (stone) joined together two walls; Jesus, in the case of the Church, joins Jews and Gentiles into one building. Peter calls believers “a spiritual house” (1Pt 2:5).

3) The idea of injury – In addition to Christ’s being the chief corner of the Church (consisting of believers), Peter (1Pt 2:6), by contrast, uses the same Greek word in reference to Christ being a “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence” – causing stumbling (a casualty) for unbelievers.

2. The idea of a building (21)

a. The pattern – **“fitly framed”** (*sunarmologoumene* – the careful process of masonry by which stones are skillfully [not haphazardly] fitted together) – **not misfits**

b. The progress (**“groweth”**) – Here and the only other place *sunarmologoumene* (in the same verb form = present passive participle) is used (Eph 4:16) the context is that of growth – here of a building, there of a body – both referring to the Church. c. The people – The noun “building” (*oikodomē*) picks up root of “household” (*oikeios*). The verb “groweth” (present tense = “keeps growing”) continues idea of an ongoing progress.

3. The idea of a temple (21) – This is not the Greek *hieron* (meaning the whole temple area) but *naos* (= inner shrine) – that special, sacred structure into which “whole building” is growing.

For 300 yrs Christians had no buildings of their own. They met in homes. The true temple is the whole Church – consisting of people, those saved by trusting solely in the Lord Jesus Christ and His shed blood for salvation from sin.

4. The idea of a habitation of God (22)

a. The effector (**“in whom”** = “BY Whom = by Jesus”) – continues the theme of verse 21 (“in [by] whom” – cf Eph 1:11f). b. The emphasis (**“ye”**) – links with verse 13

c. The edifice – God’s residence or resting place (*katoikētērios*) – God had dwelt WITH His people Israel, but now He dwells **IN** His Church.

CONCLUSIONS

A. The past – During His first coming Jesus did NOT bring external (inter-personal or international) peace. Instead, He died, paying for the eternal peace of all who trust Him for salvation. He used apostles and prophets both for revelation of truth to write the New Testament and for the foundation of the Church, making peace between Jews and Gentiles.

B. The present – In the Church age the Holy Spirit is convicting and converting sinners, baptizing into the Body of Christ (1Co 12:13), indwelling, and enabling believers to grow spiritually as the Church as a whole grows and matures.