

# CHRIST, OUR PEACE

## Ephesians 2:14

Rev. Richard D. Phillips  
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For he himself is our peace (Eph. 2:14).

If there is one thing our world needs, it is peace. In political elections, we often hear of platforms dedicated to “peace and prosperity”. Prosperity flows from peace, so a leader who can bring about peace, however temporary, is bound to be popular and successful.

One strategy for making peace is the use of the sword. This was the way of the ancient Roman Empire. Augustus Caesar, returning from his conquest of Western Europe, dedicated a great temple of peace in his own name, placing it upon the Campus Martius in Rome, the Field of Mars, the Roman god of war. The point was that war is the way to peace. It was, however, peace for some and the sword for others. The ancient historian Tacitus commented of Rome: “To plunder, butcher, steal, these things they misname Empire; they make a desolation and call it peace.”<sup>1</sup> Those who live by the sword die by the sword. The day finally came when the sword fell on Rome, and the statue Augustus had erected to himself as peacemaker was torn down; all that remains of it now is a broken-off little finger.

Another approach to peace is diplomacy. This may be a more virtuous strategy than war, but it hardly is any more successful. This is vividly displayed by the ceaseless round of Mid-East peace treaties today, none of which makes the slightest dent in the never-ending

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Agricola*, 30.

violence. Without changing the hatred, what they call peace is really a truce in which both sides reload for the next round of war. Most symbolic of the diplomatic approach is the statement of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain after his meeting with Adolf Hitler in 1938. While German factories were pouring out tanks and bombers, Chamberlain boasted, “We have achieved peace in our time.” Soon those tanks and bombers were unleashed and his era of “peace” was bathed in sorrow and blood.

Neither war nor diplomacy can ever achieve a true and lasting peace, which is why mankind has made absolutely no progress in this matter. Jeremiah complained of the false prophets, “‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). So it is today. But whereas mankind has failed, Jesus Christ proclaimed on the eve of his death a victory over sin that produces true and lasting peace. “Peace I leave with you,” Jesus claimed. “My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you” (Jn. 14:27).

The most profound teaching in the Bible on how Jesus Christ gives peace is found in Ephesians 2:14-18, which begins with the great statement: “For he himself is our peace.”

## SIN RESULTS IN CONFLICT

**A**ccording to Bible, conflict is the result of sin. The reason we lack and so greatly need peace is because of sin and its effects.

One reason for this is that God made the world in righteousness, and sin, by definition, is a violation of God’s law and therefore of the way that God ordered the world for blessing. This reminds us that God’s Law – the Ten Commandments, for instance – is not just an arbitrary set of rules made to keep us from having fun. Rather, God was setting down what is wrong and harmful in the world he has made. The second tablet of the Ten Commandments, numbers five through ten, all deal with things that cause conflict and harm. “Honor your father and mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not lie. You shall not covet” (Ex. 20:12-17). When those commandments are broken – when we sin – the result is conflict and pain.

Another reason sin causes conflict is that at the heart of sin is selfishness. Sin says to gain for yourself at the expense of others. The apostle James said: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel” (Ja. 4:1-2).

Another reason sin causes conflict is that God curses sin. The first sin took place in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God responded with curses that promised conflict. He promised enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, that is, between the unbelieving world and God’s people (Gen. 3:15). He promised conflict between the man and woman in their marital union (Gen. 3:16) and even conflict between mankind and the created world: “Cursed is the ground because of you,” he told Adam. “In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Gen. 3:17).

Conflict and misery because of sin is the story of the generations that followed. Genesis 4 tells that because of jealousy and resentment, the first son ever born into the human race, Cain, murdered his younger brother, Abel. Cain’s descendants were makers of war; the first human song ever recorded (Gen. 4:23) was written by Lamech to celebrate his killing of a man who started a fight with him. Genesis 11 takes us forward into history, when all of mankind united in a sinful desire to build the Tower of Babel in rebellion to God. God rewarded their sin with even more division, confusing their languages as a punishment.

There are three basic levels in which sin destroys peace. The first and most important is between man and God. This is vividly depicted in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve responded to the first sin by fleeing from God. Paul began his most detailed teaching of the gospel, in the Book of Romans, with this stark reality: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18).

Sin also destroys peace within ourselves. Isaiah 57:21 says, “There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.” The prophet elaborated in vivid language: “The wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt.” The sea is never at rest

because it is pulled by the magnetic force of two contrary powers, the earth and the moon. Sin does the same to us: it is a power that gets hold of us and pulls us. But however we may want him to, God never goes away. However much man may reject God or disbelieve in God, we are still made in his image, with the reality of his moral order to contend with. Therefore the voice of conscience speaks against the pull of sin, and we are gripped by a restless inner turmoil.

Finally, sin destroys peace in our relationships with others. I have already shown how this worked out in the early chapters of Genesis. But the relationship between Adam and Eve makes the point sufficiently. Prior to their sin our first parents lived in harmony and love. “They were naked and had no shame” (Gen. 2:25). But as soon as they sinned they not only felt shame and put on fig leaves, but they immediately entered into conflict. When God confronted Adam for eating the forbidden fruit, Adam became the first of a long line of male blame-shifters. Using both hands God had given him – one to point at Eve and the other to point at God – he replied, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:12). Adam was thus alienated both from God and from his wife, Eve.

At the root of all our conflict is sin. James Montgomery Boice explains:

The enemy of peace is not a lack of negotiations but the fundamental alienation that exists between every individual and God. It is because we are at enmity with God – that is the true meaning of sin – that we are also inevitably at enmity with ourselves, one another, and in a certain sense, with all the world.<sup>2</sup>

## SALVATION BRINGS PEACE

**T**he Bible teaches that redemption remedies the Fall; salvation repairs what is ruined by sin. This means that if sin brings conflict, then salvation restores peace.

When the Bible speaks of peace it means not just the absence of conflict, but harmony and blessing. The idea is fully expressed by the

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<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 85.

Old Testament word *shalom*. *Shalom* is the peace that comes from God. It is what the Levitical priests spoke of in their benediction:

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace (Nu. 6:24-26).

This peace *from* God is only possible when we have peace *with* God. The barrier between us and God is our sin. Salvation brings the cure to sin. Salvation gives us forgiveness so that we are justified in God's sight, and it overthrows the power of sin in our hearts so that our hostility to God is replaced with faith and love. Paul says, "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

The theological term for this is *reconciliation*. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 that God sent Christ into the world to reconcile lost sinners to himself: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Philip Ryken reminds us:

Reconciliation teaches something remarkable about the character of God. He befriends his enemies. He loves those who hate him. He offers peace to those who have waged war against him. Although he is the one who has been wronged, he is the one who makes things right. He does all this while the battle still rages. "When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10).<sup>3</sup>

A good example of how peace *with* God gives us peace *from* God is found in the life of the Old Testament patriarch, Jacob. His name meant *Grasper*, and his whole life was spent grasping for things his sinful heart wanted. He sought generally good things, but he sought them in the wrong ways and with wrong motives. As a result he got no blessing and no peace. Jacob gained his father's covenant blessing by lying and cheating his elder brother, Esau; he gained his riches by tricking his father-in-law to take possession of the strongest animals in his herds. Along with his new possessions he gained resentment and

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<sup>3</sup> James M. Boice and Philip G. Ryken: *The Heart of the Cross*, p. 148.

conflict. God came to him one night when Jacob's enemies were closing in on him. God wrestled with Jacob, bringing his heart into submission. Finally Jacob, having spent his whole life trying to place his hands on the blessings he wanted, instead put them onto God. He cried out to God, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Gen. 32:26). That was what God wanted: for Jacob to put his faith in him. God changed his heart and from that time forward Jacob knew a peace and blessing he never had before. God does the same for everyone who gains peace with him through faith in Christ.

Salvation gives us peace with God, peace in our hearts, and, finally, peace with other people. I mentioned that God came to Jacob at a time when Jacob was lonely and defeated. His father-in-law was chasing him from behind, and as Jacob returned to his homeland, his brother Esau was waiting for him with superior forces. Jacob tried to bribe Esau with the sheep and goats and cattle he had acquired from his wife's father, but he knew that these could not overcome Esau's hatred. He was outnumbered militarily and diplomacy was not going to work. But after Jacob had wrestled with God and come to peace with him, he was able to admit his faults and come to his brother asking forgiveness. God put his own love into Esau's heart and the brothers, long estranged, were united in peace (see Gen. 32-33).

Peace is only possible where sin is overcome and removed. Salvation means being justified with God through faith in Christ, and thereby we have peace with him. His righteousness works in our lives, so harmony and wholeness begin to replace conflict and brokenness. When we come together in righteousness and truth, we have peace with one another. The apostle John explained, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 Jn. 1:7).

## HE HIMSELF IS OUR PEACE

Paul brings all these ideas together with the powerful statement of our verse. Speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, he says, "He himself is our peace" (Eph. 2:14). It is because of Christ's work for us and our relationship with him that we receive peace and have peace to give.

When Paul says of Christ that “he himself is our peace,” he is remembering one of the great prophecies of Jesus’ birth. Best known to us is that of Isaiah 9:6-7: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end.” This is why on the night of Jesus’ birth the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Lk. 2:14).

Less well known is the prophecy that Paul quotes in Ephesians 2:14, from Micah chapter 5. That passage begins with a prophecy regarding the town of Bethlehem: “You, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days” (Mic. 5:2). The prophet had foretold a day when the Jews would be conquered as God’s judgment for their sin. But he promised that a ruler would rise up in a humble place, one who would be a divine savior, “whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” Looking forward with amazing specificity to the coming of Jesus Christ, Micah says that “he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace” (Mic. 5:4-5).

This is what it means to come to Christ in faith: to have him lead you through life as a faithful shepherd, one who died for the sheep, so that even in a world without peace we can live securely, knowing that our eternal destiny is assured and our present life held in the hands of a loving God. Jesus himself is our peace. John Calvin says, “This is a beautiful title of Christ: the Peace between God and men. Let no one doubt that God is favourable to him if he remains in Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

Paul has depicted man’s relationship with God in terms of the Old Testament temple, with its series of barriers separating sinners from God’s holy presence. Most important was the thick veil separating everyone – even the priests – from God’s inner chamber. But where

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 11:150.

the veil once barred us from God, Jesus now stands inviting us into God's blessing. He is the mediator who brings peace, the veil having fallen at the moment of his death (Mt. 27:51). He is also the mediator in our hearts, standing between us and the turmoil caused by our sin. And he stands between us and other people, giving us grace to forgive, serve, and love – to make peace by the power of Jesus Christ. In all these ways, as Psalm 29:11 tells us, “The Lord blesses his people with peace” (NIV).

## LIVING THE PEACE OF CHRIST

**S**o here is the question: do you have this peace? Are you experiencing and making peace? It is Christ who gives us peace and is our peace.

It is Christ who brings peace and love to marriages. Sin brought conflict between Adam and Eve, just as it does to couples today. The Bible tells wives to submit to their husbands, to respect them and to minister for their blessing. But women say, “You don't know my husband. He isn't worthy of respect. He doesn't do what he is supposed to do.” Therefore there is conflict, hostility, resentment. But Christ is our peace. Because of their relationship to Christ and by the power he sends, wives can build up their husbands with respect and encouragement, because they want to honor Jesus and they trust God to bless what he has commanded. Husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loved the church, to sacrifice for their well-being, to cherish them and minister to the needs of their hearts. But men say, “You don't know my wife. We're not compatible. We don't get along.” So let Christ be your peace. Remember his love for you and give it to your wife in his name. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Pray with and for your wife because Christ died for you and God brought you together in marriage. Let Jesus stand within your marriage, bringing you together in love and mutual ministry because Christ is your peace.

The same is true in the workplace, neighborhoods, and families. Our lives are filled with conflict and embittered by resentment and hostility. If someone sins against you, let Christ be your peace. Forgive them and do them good. Peter wrote, “For to this you have



been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:21-23).”

The same is true with circumstances. Bad news comes. Disaster strikes. Our hearts start filling with anxiety and turmoil. Let Christ be your peace. Remember that he who stilled the winds and the waves reigns now on high for you. Remember that your loving God is sovereign over all things. Turn to Christ, trust in him, and hear his voice in your heart, “Peace, be still” (Mk. 4:39).

Christ is our peace, especially as we turn to him in prayer – when faced with conflict or anxiety, when tempted to sin or when sinned against. Paul writes in Philippians 4:6-7, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

But the most important question is this: Do you have peace with God? Without peace *with* God you can never know the peace *of* God, the peace God gives. Even if you should cruise through life without major problems, if you are not right with God eternity will hold no peace for you. We enter this world as members of a race at war with God. Whether we acknowledge it or not, in our sin we have taken up arms against the Most High. Until we have peace with God we are living on the fault-line of a great earthquake that shakes us even now and will soon break apart in the final judgment.

But Christ is our peace with God. He does what man can never do, what no sword can impose and no treaty can enforce. Christ has removed the cause of conflict and hostility, and he is undoing the effects of sin in the lives of those who trust him. Jesus fulfilled for us the law we have broken. He has removed the veil and every barrier that stands between us and the light of God. He sends the Spirit to work the love of God into our hearts. He is the sacrifice who atoned for our sins and the priest who takes us by the hands and brings us as

children into God's family and worshipers into God's presence. Christ is our peace with God, and therefore within ourselves, and thereby with other people and with the changing circumstances of life.

## THE SONG OF PEACE

I mentioned earlier that the prophecies of Jesus speak of him as Prince of Peace, and that the angels sang of peace on the night of his birth. I want to conclude with another instance, involving Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, when he realized that the birth of his son meant that the Messiah was soon to follow. He prophesied by the Holy Spirit, singing of the peace for which the world had so desperately longed through all the warring, anguished, centuries, which finally was coming to change the world. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel," he sang, "for he has visited and redeemed his people." Because of "the tender mercy of God," Jesus Christ was coming, "to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk. 2:68, 78-79).

That song can be yours if you will come in faith to Jesus Christ, and receive the gift of peace that God has offered us through him. If you will be his disciple, trusting him and making his Word the rule for your life, you will have found the path to peace. He will give you peace. He will be your peace. And he will use you to bring peace to a hurting, dying world.