

Peace through Christ Crucified

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 February 2025

Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 00] As we come to this second part of chapter 2 of Ephesians this morning, I want to give you three statements about being a Christian and ask you to pick the one that you think is best, okay?

Three statements, ready? I don't need church to be a Christian. Number two, being a Christian is harder on my own and being part of a church helps me.

Number three, I can't be a Christian without being part of a church. Three statements, I don't need church to be a Christian.

Being a Christian is harder on my own, but being part of a church helps me. Or I can't be a Christian without being part of a church. Which one reflects where you are, what you think being a Christian is in relation to the church?

When you've got one, just put a pin in it. We'll circle back to that as we go on through our passage. But if you were with us last time, you'll remember we're looking at these passages in chapters 1 and 2 of Ephesians like photos from a wedding day.

[1 : 24] Paul's taking pictures of the one great thing that God has done so that we would know and remember it. But he shows us these three different pictures, three pictures that get fuller and busier as we go along.

So the first one we saw is just of the groom. Chapter 1, verses 20 to 23. God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in heavenly places.

At the second picture he showed us last week is of the bride with the groom. Chapter 2, verses 4 to 7. We were dead in our sins, but because he loved us with a great love, God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in heavenly places.

So there's our union with Christ that saves us. We were spiritually dead, but in love God joined us with Christ so that just as he was physically raised from the dead, so we are spiritually raised from the dead if we are united with him.

So Paul shows us, isn't he? He's showing us that we would know as Christians that we are one with Christ, bride and groom together.

[2 : 51] But who else is in the wedding photos? Unless it was a COVID wedding, and even then I'm sure there are a few of these, the family, the two families.

Because of course a wedding, it not only unites two individuals together, whether they like it or not, the wedding unites two families together. In that sense, what's happening on that day is created, hasn't it?

One new family out of the two. Just imagine this at the reception, if you can. The father of the bride's giving his speech and he says to the groom, we couldn't be happier that you're marrying our daughter.

She's found a great guy. We're delighted for you. But don't think you're one of us now. You're not part of our family. You've got your people.

We've got our people. But isn't it wonderful? Let's raise a glass to the bride and groom. Right? That would never happen, would it? It's hard to imagine. Perhaps only on the worst of wedding days.

[4 : 01] Because that union that's been formed on that day turns two families into one. And that is the third picture that Paul is showing us today. The record of what God has done in Christ isn't complete until you've seen this.

Don't miss it. He says you need to remember the saving union of Christ and his people has united two human families together.

What God has done in Christ, it works vertically between us and him. And he says it works horizontally between us and each other.

And you cannot have one without the other. That's his point this morning. So let's see that together. Peace through Christ crucified. The pattern of our verses is the same as last time.

He's telling the same story. But just now with more people in it. So what we once were. What Christ has done. And therefore finally what we are now.

[5 : 05] Beginning then with what we once were. What does Paul want us to remember that we were? Just see it in verses 11 and 12.

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what's called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands. Remember that you were.

What? Five things. Count them with me. You were at that time separated from Christ. Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.

Strangers to the covenants of promise. Having no hope and without God in the world. So that's five different ways of him telling us that we were once cut off from God and his people.

That's what you once were. He says if you're a Gentile. And that's a New Testament word for anyone who's not part of God's ancient people. The Jews.

[6 : 12] There's more than one way to understand being a Gentile. In fact, Paul uses that word in a different way later on in our letter. But here he says Gentile in the flesh.

So here he's talking about anyone who isn't biologically related to the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If you are, if you are ethnically Jewish, it's wonderful that you're here with us.

But I think that most of us, if not all of us, are not. And in that sense, you are a Gentile, according to Paul.

Now it's quite hard for us to get our heads around what Paul's saying about what we once were because we don't really think in these categories now, do we?

For us, it's so natural for us to say that everyone, anyone is welcome into God's family that we forget that even though that's true, and it has been true for the last 2,000 years, for the 2,000 years before that, it was a very different case.

[7 : 24] God's family was made up basically of one family, and he kept his people separate from the other nations. So God's people, they followed different laws, they ate different food, they lived differently, they wore different clothes, they worshipped in a different way to show that their God was different, unique, not the gods, the idols that were worshipped in the nations around them.

So as long as that was true, to have God and to have Christ, you needed to become part of that family. You needed to take on that way of life, be circumcised, eat kosher, wear the right clothes, follow the right laws, wash in the proper way.

Importantly, it mattered where you worshipped, the temple. Now there are one or two examples of people who did that in the Old Testament.

Maybe you think of people like Ruth or Rahab, but really we can count them on one hand. But the 99.9% of people who didn't do that, well, you couldn't have what belonged to God's special family, which was kind of everything.

You could even say every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Listen to what Paul says, belonged to the Jewish family.

[8 : 55] This is in Romans 9. They are the Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. So if you weren't part of that family, you were cut off from all of that.

No God, no belonging in his kingdom, no relationship to his promises, no hope, no God in the world. It would be like we go to the passport desk to get into God's kingdom, and we queue, and then we get to the front, and we hand in our passport, and the guy takes one look at it, and he says, turn around and go back.

You are not getting in. And we say, why? And he says, you cannot come into God's kingdom without a Jewish passport. And we say, well, how do we get one of those?

And he says, well, it can be done, but it's not easy. What do we have to do? Well, you have to become Jewish, and you will be issued access.

[10 : 14] Well, how do I do that? Well, there are 613 individual laws that you have to follow continuously for the rest of your life, including being circumcised, and then, and then, you will be allowed in.

So let me ask, brothers and sisters, if that was still true, how many of us here today would get into God's kingdom? How many of us would have access to God and Christ and the gospel?

Imagine coming to the door of the church this morning and being told no. God's people only. You're from the wrong family. You don't get it.

No Christ for ye. No welcome in. No hope offered. No God in the world for you to worship. And the door closes in our faces. Understand.

Remember, says Paul. Remember this. Remember that there was a time when none of us could be here as we are now. Without changing our bodies, our clothes, our diet, our citizenship.

[11 : 29] Paul commands us to remember that. Do not forget it. Now let me ask, when was the last time you even thought about that? Let me confess before I came to this passage.

Not many times for me. But there is only one imperative, one command in the whole first half of this letter. And it is this one. Remember what you were once.

Far off. Separated. Alienated. Strangers. Hopeless. Godless. For some of us, what we once were will never have occurred to us.

We never knew it to forget. Yet, Paul says, remember. Some of us are only too quick to forget. That we have no natural right to come to God and to believe in Christ and to hear the gospel and to worship him and belong to his people.

How much do we take for granted where we are now? In God's presence with his people because we don't remember what we once were.

[12 : 44] Cut off from God and his people because we were part of the wrong family. So then, what does that make us now? Are we then, as we sit here, are we second class citizens in God's kingdom?

No. But, says Paul, only because of what Christ has done. Here's our second point then. What has Christ done to change what we were? There in verse 13.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

But now, wonderfully, says Paul, when we were cut off from him, Christ was cut off from the Father.

When we were cut off from God, Christ was nailed on a cross to bring us near. There's that great love that we saw last time.

[13 : 43] The great love with which he loved us when we were far from him. That spilled his blood so that we could sit here this morning and believe in him and worship God together.

Paul says in his body on the cross, he made peace. He even says he himself is our peace. So then, what's changed?

Or to put it differently, what does peace mean? How has he made peace? It's a question lots of people are asking right now, isn't it?

Presidents are talking about what peace will mean for Ukraine. Lots of people think peace probably involves simply freezing the lines of conflict, letting people keep whatever they've managed to grab or hold on to, and probably bringing in peacekeepers, that is people with guns, to stand on the border.

So the peace that is being spoken about there is really just stopping people killing each other. No restoration, no healing, no consequences, just pressing pause and holding our breath that it sticks.

[14 : 53] Is that peace? Or there are other discussions, aren't there, about what peace would look like in the Middle East.

Their peace seems to range between creating a whole new state for people to live in, or actually just moving people away to live in other countries. Again, is that peace?

The peace that our world speaks about basically involves keeping people separate. As long as people who have been killing each other stop killing each other and stay away from each other, that's peace, we say.

You don't hear anyone suggesting that peace is people who were once killing each other, becoming a family. No one in the world thinks peace comes by tearing down walls and uniting people together.

But that is the peace that Christ made on the cross. Listen to what Christ did on the cross. Verse 14. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.

[16 : 24] In other words, the peace Christ made on the cross means that the wall that separated us from God and his people was broken down by his death and the two families, Jew and Gentile, who were once separated by that wall have become one new family in him.

Now, some people say that wall was a real brick wall that stood in the temple that separated the area where the Jewish people would go from the area where the Gentile people could go.

And we know from historians at the time that there was a sign on that wall saying, if you're a Gentile and you go past this wall, you do so on pain of death. Now, that does sound like a wall of hostility, doesn't it?

But I would go with others who say that if Paul does have that brick wall in mind, what he's talking about is more what that wall represented, the spiritual wall between Jews and Gentiles that was encoded in those ceremonial laws.

Paul says that Christ broke the wall down by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances. Now, that's not the Ten Commandments. That's the ceremonial law that governed the worship of God's people.

[17 : 44] So, the special washing, the special food, the special sacrifices they brought, the special rituals they had to do. And each one of those worship laws was like a brick in a wall that kept the nations out and so separated us from the spiritual life of God's people.

It represented God's hostility to us in our sin and his people's hostility to us as unclean and outsiders. But Paul says that when Jesus' body was broken on the cross, he demolished that wall.

By becoming the once-for-all sacrifice, he invalidated the need for any of those other sacrifices and rituals that people did to come near to God in the temple.

He brought us near by his blood because his blood is enough to bring people who were far away to come near to God. So, understand, God is no longer hostile to us when we come to him with our trust in Jesus' death because there is nothing going on in the temple anymore that can bring anyone near.

There is nothing going on in those sacrifices that Christ hasn't fulfilled in his death on the cross. And if you're sitting here today and you're not a Christian, you're thinking, wow, this is quite a lot to take in.

[19 : 19] This is the thing you need to take in. That you can come near to God just through Jesus' death for you. There is not a special ritual or a special sacrifice or a special thing you have to do or bring to come near to God.

Just put your trust in Jesus and his blood brings us near. And with that wall, then, between us and God broken down, what does he do with the two families on either side of it?

Verse 15. He broke down that wall, he says, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace. Some of you will remember, I'm sure, watching on the TV as the Berlin Wall fell and the chunks of concrete and rubble were smashed upon the floor and people on both sides of that wall stood on it and danced and sung and embraced.

Well, what we're talking about is something so much bigger, so much bigger, a 2,000-year-old wall that had kept the whole of humanity separated, not only from each other, but from God, that God has now torn down through the death of Christ and made us one new family.

And notice that that is not a blended family, where we're kind of still side by side, but defined by our human categories, where we came from, how we grew up.

[20 : 49] No, in place of the two men, Jew and Gentile, one new man, he says, in Christ. A preacher in the early church called John Chrysostom said, it's like Christ took a silver statue and an iron statue, and he took them both with him into the fairness of the cross, so that when he stepped out the other side in his resurrection, he was holding not two statues, but one gold statue.

His death for every kind of person took the two families and made them one new and better family. Neither Jew or Gentile, but a new third kind of person, a new humanity that has its origin, not in human families, but in him.

And that is how you make real peace, says Paul. And only God in Christ has ever done it and ever can do it, because he's done it on the cross. It's finished.

We struggle, don't we, to get our heads around this. I've actually found it easier and more helpful to read some of the older Christian writers on this this week, who lived maybe a bit nearer to the event, and for whom, you know, Jew and Gentile were still kind of categories in their life and in their societies.

There's a guy called Athanasius, who lived around the same time as Chrysostom in the fourth century, who says, speaking as a Gentile, Here again, we see the fitness of his death and of those outstretched arms.

[22 : 41] It was that he might draw his ancient people with the one and the Gentiles with the other and join both in himself. Even so, he foretold the manner of his redeeming death.

I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. Granting some poetic license, isn't that the most beautiful portrait of Christ's crucifixion you've ever heard?

See the power and the love and grace of Christ on the cross to bring us who were far off and those who were near and hold us together in his outstretched arms and present us together to a holy God as one ye family through his death.

And is that peace, vertical and horizontal, that Christ has made? And that Christ came and preached to those far away, Gentiles living far across the earth, and to those who were near Jews with access to the temple.

Which brings us right up to date, doesn't it? Because even though these categories may be a little bit difficult for us, when did Christ come and preach peace to us?

[24 : 06] New Christ never traveled further than that small pocket of the Middle East, did he? But Paul did. We're seeing in our study of the book of Acts, that it's not so much the acts of the apostles, but the ongoing acts of the risen Lord Jesus by his Spirit through the apostles.

So that when Paul came and preached in the power of the Spirit about the peace that Christ had made upon the cross, then Christ was preaching. So brothers and sisters, when did Christ come and preach peace to us here?

Or he's doing it now? By the Spirit-empowered preaching of the apostolic message of the peace that Christ has made.

Are you taking this in? Are you listening to the preaching of the message of Christ's peace? Are you grasping this profound and blood-bought gift that Christ has given, secured by Christ's death, preached by the apostles, being shared with us now, that once we were cut off from God and his people, but Christ on the cross has made peace with God, and therefore, peace between us sitting here.

Our third point will help us to get that. Finally then, finally, as we finish, what are we now? Now we started, didn't we, with that multiple choice question.

[25 : 38] I wonder which one you chose. I don't need the church to be a Christian. Being a Christian is harder on my own, but church helps me. I can't be a Christian without being part of a church.

I wonder if your answers changed as you've listened. If you were a one, I don't need the church. I hope by now at least that you're a two. Christ died not only to give me a new personal relationship with God, but a new relationship with his family, his people.

So being part of a church is surely important, but is it only important, or is that actually at the heart of who we are now?

What does Paul say we are in verse 19, Luke? So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Paul's telling us what we are. Christians are now citizens of God's kingdom and family members in his house. That's what we are. And it's a shared identity, isn't it?

[26 : 52] You can't be a citizen of one. You can't be a family of one. What about a holy temple? This is where he goes to town, verse 20, isn't it?

What are we? We're built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. So what are we now, this side of the cross?

We are a structure being built together for God by the Spirit. And we can't be a building like that on our own.

Paul says specifically to this church, verse 22, that you also are being built together, you Ephesians. So it can't be a theoretical unity, can it?

[27 : 49] Of us with the worldwide church, though that is true, the church big C, but it is also a unity that we experience here in the local church.

You also, church small C. And so if this is what we are now in Christ, a kingdom, a household, a holy temple, then it cannot be possible to be a Christian without being part of a church.

Not only the church, big C, but a church, little C. Because that is what we are now. We are a church. It is our new identity in Christ.

Now that is not to say that being part of a church is a condition of being saved. But it is to say that when Christ saves us, he saves us into his church.

He didn't break down that wall between us for us to go our own way. He broke down the wall between us to build us into a new facility, a new temple together. And in the past week, the elders heard two young guys give their testimony of how Christ has saved them.

[29 : 05] Praise the Lord. Therefore, they are going to be baptized and brought into the visible membership of Bon Accord because we are saved into a new relationship with God's people.

And so I wonder, brothers and sisters, is this how you think of yourself as a Christian? Is this who you think and what you think you are? Is it only me in Christ?

Or is it we in Christ? Us and Christ together. Paul says it's the church together that stands on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

That is their testimony in the Bible. It's the church together that stands on Christ, the cornerstone. It's the church together that is being built by the Spirit into a dwelling place for God.

And so if we stand on Christ and the gospel and we have God's Spirit dwelling in us, we do so not on our own, but as stones in that spiritual temple.

[30 : 12] It is in the church that God makes his home and dwells among us. And so, friends, can we see that church is not an added extra to help you in your life?

It's not a place for you to top up spiritually for the rest of the week. It's not an opt-in, opt-out. It's not there when you feel like you need it. The church is what we are as Christians.

And every Christian from every nation and background and heritage and family has a place in it. Whoever you are, if your faith is in Christ, you are being built together with your brothers and sisters in this holy temple for his dwelling and glory.

And so, do not cut your family out of the wedding photos.

Don't hold your relationship with Christ close, but your relationship with his church at arm's length. Paul instructs us to remember.

[31 : 24] So, here are two things for us to hold on to and remember as we leave this passage. Firstly, that our relationships with each other have been paid for by Christ's blood no less than our relationship with God.

He died to break down the walls between us. So, how valuable are your relationships with the people sitting around you? Paul says, they are no less precious, measured by their cost, than your relationship with God himself.

When we don't remember what we were, separated, divided, we forget how precious our church family is. And yes, it is every day and it feels every day, but let us not forget it is the wonderful every day.

It is the blood bought every day. So, do we see it? Christ died for the relationships in this room. So, brothers and sisters, whatever is between you and others here, whatever hostility there is between you and others in this church, it has no place.

because Christ died to break down those walls and make that peace between us. And you can tell how much that means to you by considering how comfortable you are thinking or speaking poorly of others or holding a grudge or not seeking forgiveness or bearing grudges or keeping others at a distance or cutting them out.

[33 : 04] we should be horrified by that behavior. We should rebuke it in others. We should repent of it in ourselves because Christ died to make peace between his people.

And so, friends, don't let that hostility that Christ dealt with on the cross start to feel at home in our church. Don't excuse it. Instead, let the peace that he made on the cross reign in our hearts, live in our mouths, on our tongues, in our relationships, in his church.

He has killed the hostility. And the second thing for us to hold on to as we leave this passage is that as we hold each other dear, no one, therefore, is second class in the church because of anything.

Where they come from, what family they're part of, their upbringing, their class, their work, how long they've been here or how long they haven't been here. Because if Christ's death overcame the great divide between Jews and Gentiles, how much more does his death overcome the divide between us Gentiles?

It's wonderful, isn't it, to be part of such a mixed and diverse church family as we have. And as people come in almost every week, they're different, aren't they?

[34 : 33] And that is a wonderful thing. We're made up from people from all over the world, aren't we? Malaysia and America and Nigeria and Scotland and Brazil and on any given Sunday, so many more people, aren't we, from all over the world.

We love that. Shouldn't we love that? And friends, Paul reminds us, doesn't he, therefore, that before we're ever a free church and before we're ever a national church.

We're a church in Christ because the church is the people and we don't all have the same upbringing or the same roots, but we are all in Christ.

Christ's blood doesn't erase our differences beautifully. He maintains our diversity. He has created us to be different, but he has given us a new identity that transcends those differences.

And so, the question is, who do we speak to? Who do we connect with? Who do we reach out to when we're together? Are we lovingly and deliberately crossing those human divides in the name of Christ to get to know brothers and sisters who are not like us, whose lives or upbringings are very different to our own or who actually the only point of commonality that we have or the only point of contact is Jesus?

[36 : 02] Maybe not even language. We don't even speak the same language, but we worship the same Christ. How intentional are we about reaching across those human divides for our unity that Christ has given us by his death?

none of us have more right to belong here than anyone else. No matter how long you've been part of this church or how little time you have spent here.

Because once we were all as far off as we could be, but by Christ's blood we have been brought near. And so, as we leave this passage, let us learn to treasure the family, the temple that God is building here at Bonacord, with those walls of hostility broken down by the blood of Christ.

For in him we also, Bonacord Free Church, are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Let's praise him for that as we pray together.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we praise you for your love that loved us before we ever knew you.

[37 : 26] Father, we thank you for the gift of Christ's death that has made peace between us and you. When we were far from you, you brought us near. And we thank you for his death that has made peace between us as his family.

Father, we thank you because we acknowledge his blood is the only reason we can be here with you and among your people. And so we pray, our Father, that we would never forget that and we would always remember it, that we would lean into each other, that we would welcome each other with the welcome of Jesus.

And Father, for those who still sit outside of this family because they sit outside of Jesus, Lord, would you draw them who are far off near by his blood today, would they know for certain that they would have a place in your family and at your table, if only for their faith placed in Jesus' death.

This we pray in his name. Amen. Amen. As we respond at...