

## He Is Our Peace

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February 24-25, 2001

"I Believe in the Church" Series

Ephesians 2:11-17

Have you ever had a really bad relationship with someone else? Of course you have. I remember when my daughter was 4 or 5 years old. On one side of our house lived one little girl and on the other side of our house lived another little girl. We discovered that little girls generally can't play in threes. They always have to form alliances of two against one. And these alliances always shift. One of the little girls was named Rachel Pope. Her parents, Dick and Cindy, were part of our church for years and left Columbus to plant a church in Virginia. My daughter's relationship with Rachel would change by the hour. She would come home and say, "I love Rachel Pope." And then an hour later she would say, "I hate Rachel Pope. I never want to play with her again." When the two of them would get in a fight with each other, there would be a mad dash to the third little girl, the third person in this trinity, to form an alliance with her before the other girl got there. "Let's together hate Rachel, OK?"

Strains in relationships are cute and funny when they happen with a 4 or 5 year old. There is a whole lot of pain when you are 25 or 35 years old, and you are going through a really messy divorce. I can remember my parent's divorce when I was 14 and it was very messy. They had a simply terrible marriage – lots of fighting, lots of pain before the divorce and the problems continued after the divorce. Only now, the issues had to do with child support and missed deadlines and lawyer bills.

What I want you to do is to call to mind just for moment, I am not trying to create undo pain here, but call to mind a really bad relationship you have had - an ex-spouse, the former spouse of your present spouse, old boyfriends or girlfriends. I am not talking about the neighbor who doesn't put weed killer down on his lawn so that his dandelions spread to your beautiful green lawn. I am talking about a really bad relationship. Call it to mind. I am talking about the kind of relationship where secretly you wish the other person would just disappear. Not necessarily die, after all you are a Christian and you could never want someone to die in a fiery car bombing or even have a quick and painless heart attack. But maybe your fantasy regarding this person comes closer to them moving to Tibet where they take vows of silence and live in a monastery for 20 years. You just want them to disappear.

The classic bad relationship, of course, is the famous feud between the Hatfields of West Virginia and the McCoys of Kentucky back in the 1870's and 1880's. That was a time when feuds were really feuds. These were tough men with names like Devil Aunce and Squirrel Hunting Sam and Bad Lias. These were men

who relied on their skill with guns and fighting. They made whiskey and logged timber. They fished and hunted in the woods and they hated each other.

Randolph McCoy, who they used to call “Old Ran’l” had 16 children – 9 of them big fighting boys. And Devil Ance Hatfield wasn’t far behind. He had 13 children, also had 9 fighting sons. When Devil Ance was a boy, just for fun he kicked a sleeping bear awake and then held it captive for two days wrestling around with the bear.

These were proud people. These were murderous people. These were folks who refused to forgive an offense. The whole feud started over a pig. Old Ran’l stopped to visit a Kentucky Hatfield, his wife’s brother-in-law named Floyd. While he was there he spotted a familiar looking pig, which he claimed to be his own. He accused Floyd of theft.

They got in a fight and it ended up in court. One of Old Ran’l’s own nephews was also related to Hatfield, he was the brother-in-law. These families were pretty interbred. There was one fellow named Bill Stanton who testified that Hatfield really owned the pig and McCoy didn’t. So Hatfield won the court battle. The McCoy’s weren’t happy with that. They caught up with the guy who testified against them and got in a gunfight with him and killed him.

Then one of McCoy’s daughters fell in love with one of Hatfield’s sons. It was a classic Romeo and Juliet story of star-crossed lovers. The McCoy’s dragged the son of Hatfield out and were going to kill him. That created another war.

Before the feud finally ended, there were 13 Hatfields and McCoy’s murdered and dozens injured. Governors of West Virginia and Kentucky actually had to call out the National Guard. There was almost a border war across the state lines – 14 years of feuding and fighting, court suits and settlements – no peace. It took a couple of generations before the feud settled down.

People throughout history have tried to establish some kind of lasting peace where relationships have broken down. Most of the attempts have been utterly feudal. I think of the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain who in one of the most ill-conceived acts in history, agreed to divide up Czechoslovakia and give half of that country and all of its defenses to Hitler. It is known as the Munich Agreement in 1938. You read Chamberlain’s speech, which was titled “Peace in Our Time” that he delivered before the British Parliament in 1938 and it is a monument to naiveté. It is an absolute monument to misplaced hopes and dreams. After carving up Czechoslovakia and giving away all of its force and all of its arms, and demilitarizing the whole country, Chamberlain said before the British Parliament, “It is my hope and belief that under this new system of guarantees the new Czechoslovakia will find a greater security than she ever enjoyed in the past.”

Total unilateral disarmament; slicing up the country and giving half of it to Hitler will result in greater security. Chamberlain goes on and says, “I pass from that subject and I would like to say a few words in respect of the various other participants beside ourselves in the Munich Agreement. After everything that has been said about the German Chancellor today and in the past, I do feel that the House ought to recognize the difficulty for a man in that position, to take back such emphatic declarations as he has already made amidst the enthusiastic cheers of his supporters and to recognize that in consenting, even though it was only at the last moment, to discuss with the representatives of the other powers, those things which he declared he had already decided once and for all, was the real and substantial contribution on his part. And with regard to Senor Mussolini, I think that Europe and the world have reason to be grateful to the head of the Italian government for his work in contributing to a peaceful solution. Yes, I believe that we will enjoy peace in our time.”

There is Neville Chamberlain standing outside of his home on 10 Downing Street, waving the Munich Agreement proudly in the air and saying, “I have here the signature of Herr Hitler swearing that our two nations will never go to war with one another again.” Sadly, Chamberlain went down in history as one of its greatest fools.

I want to make one simple point today. That is that human beings apart from God cannot produce peace. We can produce treaties. We can produce cease fires. We can produce settlements. But we can’t produce peace. Peace means a mending of what is broken, a joining together of what is torn, a real healing that creates a love and sympathy and understanding of each other.

God will let people have a great many things apart from. Even if people never look to him, God will allow them to be successful. God will let people become wealthy. God will let people be sports heroes. God will let people win Grammy Awards and jet set all over the world. You don’t have to look to God to get a great tan in a tanning salon or destroy your competitors in business or to become president of the United States. God will let people have all kinds of things, even if they never give him the least bit of credit for their success.

There is one thing, however, that a person cannot have apart from going to God and that is peace. You can have success. You can have a big bank account. You can have sex. But you cannot have peace unless you go directly to God for it. The passage that we are going to read today announces this principle very plainly. We read “He is our peace.” That’s the title of today’s talk, “He Is Our Peace.” Let’s pray.

*Ephesians 2:11-17 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to*

*the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

The apostle Paul begins this passage with one concrete historical example of people who have broken relationship with each other. People who are at war with one another. He says, *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision”*...There was name calling back and forth. Uncircumcised was a term of derision. Paul goes on and says in verse 14, *He himself is our peace who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.*

The situation between Jews and Arabs today is actually not as extreme as the hostility that existed between Jew and Gentile in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Rabbis back then taught that Gentiles were born into the world in order to be fuel for the fires of hell. It was like one more log has been born into the world so that the fires of hell will burn more brightly. It was unlawful for a Jew to help a Gentile woman who was giving birth because they would be assisting in bringing a heathen into the world.

As far as the wall of hostility, Paul was talking about a literal wall that existed in the Temple in Jerusalem. In the Temple there was a wall that separated the court where the Gentiles stayed in order to pray from the place where the Jews went to pray and worship. On that wall was a plaque. Some archeologist in 1934 found the plaque and it said, “No Gentile may enter the area which surrounds the Temple and its enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”

Hostile enough? And if you roll the tape forward nearly 2000 years, you see a world that is similarly wrapped by division. There are all kinds of warfare going on in the former Soviet Union. North and South Korea is still divided. There is bombings and violence along the Indian/Pakistani border. Rebel armies are marching in Columbia. The Hutu's and Tutsi's are still killing one another in sub-Saharan Africa. When you look at the world, you see a world that is divided.

Even here in the US we have racial divisions that remain unhealed. There are a lot of suspicions and class divisions, political divisions that became more and more evident during this last election. As you look into your own home, how

many of you can say, "Well, at least, within my family and extended family, we have complete peace." Many husbands and wives live together in a state of cold war. When they do talk about things beyond what's on TV tonight, there is always a fight. They can never talk about money, the kids, work, their parents or sex without fighting. The American family is a battleground.

And if you zoom in even closer in your own life and heart, would you say that you live in a regular state of peace? Do you have an inner sense of quietness, of calmness? What is your inner state most of the time? Would you say harmony? Serenity? Or most of the time you are impatient? Tense? Anxious? Pulled to the breaking point?

Verse 14 says, *For he [meaning Christ] himself is our peace.*

Let me repeat what I said before. You can have all kinds of things, all kinds of success, without giving God a passing nod. But if you want peace, if you really want to bring about complete unity and harmony and healing between people, you have to go to God directly for it. There is no human source for peace. Not counseling or education. Peace is not going to be found in a bottle of pills or tranquilizers. It is not going to be found in therapy or in biofeedback or in international conferences. The gift of peace is found only in Christ. He is our peace.

How does Christ work out peace between hostile people? How do we come to peace? Some of you have prayed about things over and over again. You have asked God for healing. You have asked God for change. But you still find yourself in a place of hostility.

The first thing that the apostle Paul tells us is if you want to have peace, you need to remember your past. Verse 11, *Therefore remember...underline that word remember...that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and call "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men) remember [a second time he says that] that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.*

One of the main problems of relational problems is our failure to remember. We could broaden this out beyond healing of our relational differences and say that one of the secrets of the spiritual life is cultivating a good memory. 166 times the Bible commands people to remember. What is it that we should remember? Certainly, one of the keys to spiritual growth is to deliberately apply your mind to remember key verses of scripture in places where you are weak, in places where you face continual temptation.

Let's say regarding anxiety or regarding gossip or stuff that just comes out of your mouth, you have a lack of self control over your tongue. Memorizing verses of scripture and meditating on them is a key spiritual discipline and secret to spiritual growth. I would encourage you to do that.

Paul says twice, *Remember...* Let me put it a different way. One of the major obstacles that you and I have in growing spiritually is that we have incredibly short memories. You get burned by making a disastrous decision in a relationship. You date outside the faith or you let a relationship get more physical than you know you should. You hook up with a certain type of person who turns out to be a loser. The short of it is you get burned and you experience great grief because of this relationship. You lose sleep. You feel awful. You are torn up for weeks with self accusation – How could I be so stupid? How could I let this happen? What was I thinking? You fall all over yourself repenting and you swear before God, “Never again. I have learned my lesson. Never again. Not that activity. Not that sin. Not that kind of relationship. I will never get involved like that again.”

And then three months later, you repeat the pattern all over again with the same self-incriminating feelings and the same consequences. Have any of you ever done this? Gone back to the same disaster over and over and over again? AA defines insanity as repeating the same behavior over and over again expecting different results.

One way out of the trap is cultivating a good memory. You know, the enemy always wants you to forget. The enemy's goal is always to seduce you into not thinking deeply. A lot of people think that to become a Christian or to grow as a Christian you basically have to sever your head from the rest of your body and not think. A lot of people accuse Christians of not thinking. But I believe it is exactly the reverse. The only way to have a deep relationship with God is to think deeply about your life and what you are really like and what you really need. The enemy always comes along and says, “Don't think about it. Don't rehearse the consequences of bad behavior. Don't call to mind your prayers or the pain you suffered as a result of sin. All of that stuff is just too depressing. Move on,” the enemy says. “Move on. Just let go of the past and do what comes naturally. Go with the flow. Don't think,” the enemy says. “Don't remember. Just go for it. Eat that brownie. Push that snooze alarm. Go out tonight instead of studying. Pull out that credit card. Hop into bed with your boyfriend. Don't think. Don't remember.”

166 times the Bible says “remember.” Remember how you felt the last time. Remember what God says about what you are doing. Remember God's Word. Remember the pain you felt.

And Paul specifically tells us that if you want to heal a relationship, you need to remember, you need to consciously call to mind and focus upon where you came

from. If you are at war with someone else, the first thing you need to do is remember where you came from. Unless you see yourself as a miracle of grace, unless you see yourself as you were without Christ, there is no hope that your relationship with another person could be cured. Because what's at the root of most relational problems? It is the feeling that I'm not like you. I would never do that. I would never say that. I can't believe you did that to me. I would never gossip. I can't believe you said that about me.

Then God says, "Remember, would you like me to have an angel roll back the tape of what you just said last Thursday? Marvin?" That's the name of the angel, by the way, that does the video taping of the events of your life. "Marvin, let's show her a tape from last Thursday and a conversation she was having with her friend." You wonder how someone could gossip about you? Let's listen in on your conversation and what you just said. You wonder how someone could be so mean and thoughtless and turn down someone in need? Let's go back a year and a half when your sister called you and was depressed. Remember where you came from, friend.

The apostle starts off and says, *Remember at that time you were separate from Christ*. The most important thing you could ever say about someone concerns their relationship with Christ. The most important question you can answer is "where are you at right now with the Son of God?"

See, this is the major division that runs through the whole human race. We always draw the line in the wrong place. So many relationships remain broken because we draw the line in the wrong place – in the church world. We divide people off between Protestant and Catholic; Evangelical and Charismatic. We focus on the externals of how do you worship? Christians are dividing off from each other based on whether there is a guitar on the stage or whether you have a choir. What version of the Bible do you use? We draw the line based on people's education. Based on people's race. Based on people's class. The major dividing line is where do you stand with Christ? He says, *Remember...the most important thing that can be said of somebody is that at one time you were separated from Christ*.

It's because we draw the line in the wrong place that we get so confused about the need for evangelism or world missions. Why must you really pray for people in your workplace? Why must you pray for opportunities to share your faith? I don't say why would it be a good idea to pray? Why must you, if you are a Christian, pray for opportunities to share your faith and give to world missions? Why must you pray for a loved one to come to know Christ? And talk with your parents and your brothers and sisters and your in-laws even when talking about issues of faith is embarrassing and uncomfortable and you can tell that this other person doesn't necessarily agree with what you are saying.

Because Christ is the dividing line for the whole world. Because where a person is at with Christ is the most important thing that you can say about that person. We don't get it. We think that the dividing line is morals or niceness. "Well, I don't know if she is a Christian, but she is such a nice person. She is so helpful and she is a good listener. I am sure that in the end everything will work out between her and God."

"I don't need to talk to him. He is a really nice guy. I don't see that big of a difference between that non-Christian man and this Christian man regarding how they relate to their kids or how clean they keep their car."

We draw the line in the wrong place. The line of separation is not how someone raises their kids, however important that is, or how clean their car is. The line of separation is not between one race and another, or between one class and another. Those lines are insignificant. They mean nothing. It's where you are with Christ. Remember at one time you were on the wrong side of the line regarding Christ. Regarding the most important issue in life, you failed. You can pass in a thousand things, but if you fail in this one thing, Christ, you fail.

Paul says, remember where you were at. You were excluded from citizenship in Israel. In other words, you were outside the community of faith. Israel in the Old Testament was the object of God's special care. God chose Abraham from all the people on the earth and set his affection on Abraham. And through Abraham on his descendants, on Isaac, Jacob and the descendants of Jacob. There was a special electing love reserved for Israel that didn't extend to everyone else in the world. There is a general love for the world, but there is a specialness, a choseness, a special attention, God's special gift was reserved for Israel. And Paul says, remember, you were on the outside of all of that.

You know the feeling of being outside the circle, don't you? You find yourself in a setting where everyone knows each other and is close, everyone but you. You feel awkward. You walk around with a fake smile. You hang around the edge. You try to say a few things, but no one pays attention to you. They talk to each other. You are irrelevant to their relationships. You are irrelevant to their conversation. That's what you were, Paul says, remember you were irrelevant. You didn't belong.

I just want to say by way of parentheses that if you feel like an outsider when it comes to the Christian faith, you don't have to stay there. Some of you have had your faces pressed against the glass looking in on Christianity for a long time. Other people you know are inside. You can sense there is a difference between them and you. They are playing the game. They are on the inside. Well, you don't have to stay on the outside with your face pressed against the glass. You can come in today by really finally totally surrendering your life to Christ.



And with regard to this issue of relational breaks, have you ever asked yourself whether the person you are disputing with feels like an outsider? Have you ever walked around in that other person's shoes and said, "I wonder if this person who I find so upsetting feels totally irrelevant? They feel like a throwaway? That they don't matter to me or to us or to our group?" If you are an insider, do you remember what it felt like to be an outsider? You have all the friends now, and all the support, and all the props and they have nothing.

The apostle Paul says *Remember you were strangers to the covenant of promises*. When God chose Abraham, he made special promises to him. He said, "I am going to bless you and make you into a great nation. I am going to give you a huge inheritance in this land." And your position, outside of Christ, was that you were not the beneficiary of any of God's promises.

Let me put it this way, the only inheritance you were ever going to get was the inheritance passed down to you by your parents. If you are not attached to Christ, the only thing you can ever expect in this world by way of inheritance is the inheritance that is going to come down to you through your family line. I am not just talking about money or property. But you are going to get your family line's genetics and their habits and their tendencies. You can say, "Oh, let's see what mom gave me. Great." Ladies, you got your mother's thighs or her perfectionism or her criticalness or her depression. Men, you got your dad's temper or his passivity or his problem with pornography or his unwillingness to acknowledge wrong.

Outside of Christ, there is no other inheritance. The joy of becoming a Christian is that we get placed in a new family line – the family line of the Son of God and God gives us an inheritance through Christ. You get a new nature. You get planted in new soil. You have a new identity. Maybe your parents were divorced, but that doesn't have to be your identity any longer. The negative inheritance that they passed down to you does not have to be your life's script. God gives you a different script. He makes you an heir of the promises.

Paul concludes, *You were without hope and without God*. One of the major reasons why people have relational difficulty is they lose hope that anything could change. There is a ministry to marriages in crisis called "Recovering of Hope." The creators of this ministry knew that marriages collapse when people give up hope. When they look across the room at the other person and they say, "Forget it. This ain't changing. We'll never stop fighting. It will never get better. He will always be unaffectionate. She will always be negative and complaining. He will always have a drinking problem." The ministry of restoring marriages and the ministry of restoring relationships are all about restoring hope. Because if you have no hope, you just walk away.

Outside of Christ the only hope that an individual has is in what this world can offer. A person hopes in the doctor's opinion or in this therapy. Or you hope that

you will get into the right school or that you will get a great review by your boss or that you will get in the right graduate program. The apostle Paul is saying, "Remember when your hopes were fixated totally on what this world could offer? And you had no hope outside of that?" What are you pinning your hopes on regarding the healing of your marriage? What are you pinning your hopes on regarding the healing of a broken relationship? I mean no wonder there is so much depression and despair when people's hopes are fixated totally on this world and what it offers. The props are so easily pulled out. Outside of Christ, our hope is so fleeting.

The Christian has an entirely different basis for hope. We are not just hoping for a miracle cure or that a therapist can reconcile us. We are not just hoping that this other individual will give up their bad habits. The Christian's hope is in the Lord who made the heaven and the earth. This is the difference between being a Christian and a non-Christian. The difference between being a Christian and a non-Christian is not that the Christian has no trouble and the non-Christian has trouble. Jesus said, he made us a solemn promise, "In this world you will have trouble." The Christian may lose his job just like the non-Christian. The Christian may have family troubles, just like the non-Christian. The Christian can have a very challenging marriage, or problems with their parents or roommate, just like the non-Christian. A Christian can get into a dispute with a car dealer or a plumber or their accountant, just like the non-Christian. A Christian can get sick or be diagnosed with a tumor or have problems with their roof or their pet. Being a Christian doesn't guarantee that your plane won't be delayed or that someone won't be mad at you or break your heart or break a relationship or gossip about you. Christians' hope is not that everything in the world will go well for us.

The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is when the Christian goes through difficulty, they go through it with God. Before, your position was that you were without hope because you were without God. The non-Christian goes through difficulty alone.

We have God with us, that's our hope, not the doctors, the experts, not our bosses or the visible change we can measure in this other person. Our hope is that we have God's with us. I think of a woman who is married to a professional and this professional decides that he doesn't want to be married any more and so he pursues a divorce. He can afford a high-powered attorney. He got a very favorable settlement and every two years this guy drags this woman to court to argue about their settlement and to renegotiate the visitation. He knows she can't afford it. He just drags her over broken glass every couple of years.

Being a Christian doesn't mean you won't have major relational stress. What it does mean is that you don't have to go through that relational stress alone. What the Christian pins their hope on is outside of this world. We have God with us.

And no book of the Bible expresses this better than the Psalms. You see the psalmist as a distressed person, as a poor man, as a person who has no resource in this world. What does the psalmist say? Psalm 23, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Yea, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, thou art with me.* Its not that the believer doesn't go through the valley of the shadow of death, its that thou art with me, O Lord.

Apart from God, the best that someone can say in this world is "I am a survivor." That's why I think the show, Survivor, is so popular, along with its voyeuristic appeal, we get to look in on other people's lives and see how they relate and the dynamics there. But apart from God, that's all this culture has to offer – I am a survivor of incest. I am a survivor of abuse. I am a survivor of divorce. A Christian is more than a survivor.

So, first thing, if you are going to have peace, you better remember where you came from and really look at yourself in the mirror and say, "I am a miracle of grace. Everything I have, if I have a relationship with Christ, if I have a new inheritance, if I am an insider and not an outsider, if I have hope – it is all because of grace. I am not better than this other person. I am not different than this other person."

If we are going to have peace, we need to get to the root of what our division really is. The root problem, friend, is not your spouse's temper or her spending habits or your neglect or her inability to forgive or this other person's gossip. We offer such superficial diagnoses for what the real problem is. Sometimes I feel like the approach that some people take towards the healing of their relationships is like a dermatologist cutting off an odd shaped mole that is on your back or under your arm, but they never get the cancer that has spread to the lymph nodes. Yes, you can get communication skills by going to a counselor. But the root problem is described in verse 13, But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

The root problem is never merely horizontal. It's never merely that whites have historically been racist in their attitudes towards blacks or have been proud and tried to take the lion's share of the resources. The root problem is never merely that a black person plays the racial card in order to benefit. The real problem is never merely horizontal – my relationship with you and yours with me.

The root problem always fundamentally is vertical. That you were once far away – far away from who? Far away from God. You can't solve relational problems until we solve the primary problem, which is your relationship with God. When a person is at war with God, they are restless. When you are at war with God, you are unhappy. When you are at war with God, you can't get beyond yourself or your own needs. If you are at war with God, then you are going to be at war with other people around you. The person who is experiencing all kinds of relational problems, everywhere they walk there are torn relationships, torn friendships,

torn relationships with parents, torn relationships at work, there are problems with bosses, problems with employees. The root problem is not going to each of the 50 different relationships and trying to negotiate that. The problem is that they are at war with God. A person is far away from God.

A counselor can deal with your communication and your finances. They can negotiate a cease fire. But real peace? That only comes through the blood of Christ.

Let me put it this way. The reason why we fight wars, the reason why we fight in our families, the reason why we struggle with ourselves, the core of the problem is in our own hearts. That's why Paul mentioned the blood of Christ in verse 13. That's why he mentioned in verse 16, *And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility.*

Let me illustrate what I mean. You talk to a couple who has just separated. You ask them why is it that you aren't living together after you swore that you would live together until death us do part.

"Well, Rich, she is just impossible. No one could live with her. She is unforgiving. She is cold. She is a terrible housekeeper."

You talk with the woman and she will say "Well, that man is just impossible. He is lazy. He can't hold a job. He never talks. He just sits silently in front of the TV."

But you put that man or woman face to face with the cross that Jesus died on, you give them a sudden burst of insight regarding how far away they are from God, that they have a fundamental problem that they are at war with God and they can only be brought near by the blood of Jesus. And as that man or woman looks at the cross, they have a very different story to tell. They say, "My gosh, for the first time in my life, I see myself as I really am. I have had me revealed to me. I never realized how selfish I am, how proud, how impatient, what I sound like when I am mad. But now, when I look at the cross I see the Son of God hanging there bloody for me. I see what it took for God to make peace with me. Nails through his hands. Nails through his feet. I guess the problem is not just this other person. I guess their problems may be different than mine, but before God those differences melt into insignificance."

We will never have peace until we remember who we are and until we get to the root problem, which is our relationship with God and until we understand the radical program, the radical solution that God uses to make peace. Verse 15, *His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of two thus making peace. And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.* Paul is saying that peace between people is possible only as people are converted and are brought into the Christian church. The church, Paul says, is God's new

creation. Look at it in verse 15, *His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace.* The way that God healed the division between Jew and Gentile was by creating something that had never existed before, the church.

That's how God heals people's division, by a new creation. See, the way we would heal a division between a Jew and a Gentile is we would try to get the Jew and the Gentile to try to compromise. Well, Jewish person, why don't you give up a few of the things that you count really important that are building a war between you. Give up your obsession with what you eat and have a ham sandwich. Give up some of your rituals. And Gentiles, you have to give up some of your prejudices against Jews. Maybe learn a few Hebrew prayers. Pray Haave Nagilla. Meet each other half way across the bridge." That's the human solution for people's problems – we just have to meet half way.

God's solution is so much more radical. He doesn't try to make the Jew into a Gentile or the Gentile into a Jew. He doesn't say compromise, go 50/50. He creates something entirely new, something that's never existed before. Let me illustrate this for you.

A few years ago my family and I went back to New York City. We went down to Ellis Island where millions of immigrants passed through before being allowed into America. They had some recordings of people's voices from Ellis Island from the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. You hear this cacophony of different accents and different names and different dialects and languages. There is an Italian man speaking and a Czech and a little Russian girl and someone is speaking Chinese. And there is a person with an Irish accent. Millions of people coming from all different parts of the world, they come to Ellis Island with different customs and different backgrounds. They look different. They smell different. They dress different. How are they going to get along in the US?

The answer was not to make the Czech person a little bit Italian – here try this pasta. Or the Chinese person a little bit Irish – here's some corn beef and cabbage. The solution was much more radical. They became something new. They became Americans – no longer merely Italians or merely Jewish or merely Greek – a new creation—America. And you heard these folks with all their different accents saying, "I am an American."

This is what God did in creating the Christian church. You are coming from a Jewish background, a Gentile background – no longer Jew or Gentile – Christian. Part of this new creation the church. No longer just Lutheran or Catholic or charismatic or evangelical. Christian. We are part of the church. It doesn't matter where you come from. What matters is what you have come to. Jesus Christ in his church. Have you come to Christ? He is our peace. Let's pray.

## **He Is Our Peace**

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Rich Nathan

February 24-25, 2001

"I Believe in the Church" Series

Ephesians 2:11-17

### **I. Where is Real Peace?**

### **II. What is Our Remembered Position? (Eph. 2:11-12)**

- A. Separate from Christ
- B. Excluded from Citizenship
- C. Foreigners to the Covenant
- D. Without Hope; Without God

### **III. What is the Problem? (Eph. 2:13)**

### **IV. What is God's Radical Program (Eph. 2:15, 16)**