

The sermon

Intro

Relational difficulties. Nobody enjoys it.

When people disagree and the relationship disintegrates into bickering, it's a painful, agonizing thing.

When someone perceives an offense and won't let it go and hatred follows, it's a painful, agonizing thing.

When people are divided along cultural lines (young versus old) or racial lines (black versus white), it's a painful, agonizing thing.

Human hostility is a painful thing. Jesus has acted to bring peace among peoples. But there's another form of hostility. Hostility between God and man. Jesus has acted to reconcile this relationship too.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: Jesus' death created reconciliation (2:14-17)

For he himself is our peace,

"he" = Jesus. Peace comes through Jesus.

What peace?

who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

The "both" are Jews and Gentiles. There was a dividing wall that created hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles. Jesus has broken the wall. With the wall broken, the source of hostility has been removed. How did Jesus break down the wall? Well, it's something he did in his physical body ("in his flesh").

by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances,

Jesus has toppled "the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law." The wall of hostility fell when the law was abolished.

that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,

Jesus' purpose in abolishing the law was "to create...one new man." The two are Jews and Gentiles. Jesus abolished the law so that Jews and Gentiles could be one unified people.

and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

What did Jesus do to bring an end to the hostility? He died on the cross. "both" again = Jews and Gentiles. "one body" = the "one new man" = the church.

Why did Jesus die? Many reasons. Here there's three:

- 1) To reconcile individuals to God (or to kill the hostility between God and us).

This means there's hostility between God and man. We're born into the world with a ruptured relationship with God. The cross is the one and only way this hostility can be removed.

- 2) To form "one body" = the church.

Jesus' doesn't just reconcile individuals and leave them hanging out in the middle of nowhere. These reconciled people become the church.

3) To kill the hostility between Jews and Gentiles.

"in one body" the Jews and Gentiles become one. Jesus' death unifies enemies!

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

Jesus came. Jesus *"preached peace to you who were far off"* = Gentiles. And Jesus *"preached peace to those who were near"* = Jews. Those Jews and Gentiles being the Ephesian believers. How did Jesus preach to the Ephesians?

Knowing that Jesus didn't literally step foot in Ephesus, Paul means Jesus preached peace to the Ephesians through Paul and other believers. Jesus is present and with us in mission, he's indwelling us, such that he's preaching peace through us (Matt 28:20).

BIG PICTURE? Through his death on the cross, Jesus brings peace with God to all those who believe. We aren't born into the world having peace with God. We're born into the world separated from God because of our sinful nature that makes us rebels who sin. We can only have peace with holy God whom we've sinned against through the death of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, when people groups who are naturally hostile to one another (Jew/Gentile, rich/poor, blue collar/white collar, young/old, Black/white/Asian/Hispanic) come to Christ and experience peace with God, they find themselves having peace with each another.

Illustration

The "hostility" refers to an inner hatred that makes people enemies of one another. Inner hatred results in feuds.

Something like the Democrat/Republican hostility. If there's an issue, they disagree. Whether how to interpret the Constitution, how to handle girl's sports, how to handle immigration. Abortion policies, gun policies, environmental policies, the death penalty. You name it. They disagree.

If you've seen any of the debates or TV ads, there's real animosity. They want to make each other look bad. They don't want to work together. They don't want to reach agreement. They view each other as the enemy. Generally, there's bad blood.

Application

Jesus died to make hostile parties (Jew and Gentile) one. Not to make them one in nothing or one in favorite sports team. No, to make them one in Christ.

When a person comes to terms with God's holiness and their sin and God's mercy in Christ, and they repent and believe, they experience peace with God. Their whole life changes because their attitude towards God changes. They see life in a new way. They start to love what God loves and hate what God hates.

With this new affection for God, people who were once at odds find themselves sharing much in common. Enemies become partners in gospel mission. That's what Jesus died for.

Jesus has created peace between us. Any division stems from us not God.

Point 2: Jesus' death abolished the law (2:15)

Whereas the Democrats and Republicans have a seemingly endless number of divisions, the Jews and Gentiles had one primary source of division: the law.

by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances,

Jesus, through his death, toppled *“the dividing wall of hostility.”* What had to happen for the dividing wall to come down? The law had to be abolished. What law was abolished? *“the law of commandments expressed in ordinances”* = the Law of Moses, Mosaic covenant, old covenant. What does Jesus’ death have to do with the law being destroyed? Jesus’ death established a new covenant that replaced the old covenant.

A word of caution. Moral laws in the Law of Moses like honor father and mother, don’t steal, don’t covet, don’t commit sexual immorality, these remain binding. We find them repeated in the New Testament. In fact, Ephesians gives these old covenant instructions to Christians. Some rules of conduct were limited to the time when the Gentiles were *“strangers to the covenants of promise”*: dietary laws, sacrifices, civil laws.

What does this have to do with the dividing wall?

With the end of the old covenant, rules that divided Jew and Gentile are gone. For example, the dietary laws prevented Jews from eating with Gentiles. A Jew couldn’t eat a meal with Gentiles because they couldn’t eat their food. Because the old covenant has been abolished, you can eat bacon without being under God’s curse. Things have changed through Jesus’ death!

With the end of the old covenant, a Jewish believer could marry a Gentile believer. The point wasn’t racism. The point was preventing God’s chosen people from following the idolatrous ways of the nation.

With the end of the old covenant, God no longer favored one nation to the exclusion of others. Remember, there was a time when the Gentiles were separated, alienated, strangers, *“having no hope and without God in the world”* (2:12). The old covenant divided people nationally.

The promises under the old covenant had a material bent: military success, fertility, health, wealth. Not so with the new covenant. The new covenant blessings have a spiritual focus rather than a material focus: a new heart, forgiveness of sins. And an eternal focus: everlasting possession of the land, the entire covenant community knows the LORD.

New covenant

At the last supper, Jesus said, *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”* (Luke 22:20).

After Jesus died, *“the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom”* (Matt 26:51), signifying the end of the old covenant sacrificial system.

Recall Darryl’s reading where Christ mediates a better covenant than the old (Heb 8:6). Where the new covenant makes the old covenant obsolete (Heb 8:13).

Hebrews 10:9 says, *“He does away with the first in order to establish the second.”*

That’s what Paul’s saying: the old covenant ended at the cross.

Application

So Christian, you’re not being inconsistent when you say I can eat bacon but I can’t steal. You’re just a person with good theology who knows the old covenant has been abolished, bringing an end to things like dietary laws and animal sacrifices. But you also know that commands regarding personal conduct in the old covenant (don’t lie, don’t steal) reflect God’s moral will for all times. That’s why these commands show up again in the New Testament.

Point 3: Jesus' death created one new man (2:15)

Why did Jesus end the old covenant?

that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

In putting an end to the old covenant, Jesus creates “one new man in place of the two,” which is both Jew and Gentile “in one body,” the church. Jesus died to make Jew and Gentile one.

There's a lot of talk about the church and Israel. Has the church replaced Israel? What exactly happened at the cross?

1. Technically it's a merger, not a replacement.

The church begins with a small group of Jewish disciples who take the gospel to the nations. Some from the nations believe. These Jewish and Gentile believers merge into one body, the church.

2. Technically it's a narrowing of Israel, not a replacement of Israel.

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, – Romans 9:6

The believing Jew, not every ethnic Jew, becomes part of the church and an heir to the promises in the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants. True Israel narrows to the believing Jews, not the whole nation.

3. Technically, it's also an expansion of Israel, not a replacement of Israel.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. – Galatians 3:28-29

Israel expands in that the believing Gentile becomes Abraham's offspring.

Does Israel retain any uniqueness?

Yes, in that no other nation is promised that they will return to their land and their divided tribes will become one (Ezek 37:21-22). Israel was divided into Judah and Israel after the death of Solomon. These may have already been fulfilled in 1948? No other nation is promised a mass conversion at the end of this age (Rom 11:25-27). Promises remain for Israel. No other nation has promises like these.

Application

As for us, we don't have a Jew-Gentile problem here. That's not our struggle. What struggles might we have? Young versus old. New members versus long-time members. This theological persuasion versus that theological persuasion. This preference versus that preference. Plenty of soil for Satan to work with. I don't see any racial threats. I guess that could change. I don't see any rich/poor, educated/uneducated threats. I guess that could change.

What protects the church?

Supernatural community. There's nothing special when a group of people with shared life experiences get along. We don't want to be a church where everyone works in the medical field or everyone is a plumber. We don't want to be a church where everyone is under 30 or everyone is over 70. We don't want our community to be based on shared life experiences/situation rather than Christ. We want to be a supernatural community where different types of people with diverse backgrounds function well together because we're a people who've experienced peace with God.

If our faith is based on our personal preferences and our past experiences, we'll be an awful community. What brought bitter enemies, Jew and Gentile, together? They each experienced peace with God through Jesus Christ. How can our faith bring us together?

Well, our faith stems from God's promises in his word. I suggest that we sit under God's word together and let it take us where it will. Let the Bible speak to our practice and policies and purpose. Let the Bible shape our decision-making. Let our default be, is this biblical? Where is that in the Bible? What biblical principles would apply here? Paul expects Christians to be of the same mind (Phil 1:27; 2:2).

And there's room for allowing disagreement, acknowledging that people who disagree have good motives in doing so, and letting others be fully convinced in their own mind (Rom 14:5-6).

Unity is found in Christ. Not shared traditions nor shared preferences. Unity in Christ, rooted in God's word, kills divisions common to mankind! Common allegiance is the answer. We need to work through things in mutual submission to Christ.

Jesus didn't die simply to bring forgiveness of sins to individuals. Jesus died to bring sinful individuals into community with one another. The church is God's idea! Jesus died to make bitter enemies one. Jesus died to bring people from diverse backgrounds together in gospel mission! So that we might bring in new people different from ourselves.

Jesus has done everything necessary for us to be at peace. Any division stems from us, not God.

Same in the home. God saves a man and woman so they can have a peaceful marriage. God saves siblings so they can see life the same way and be united in gospel mission! Any division stems from us, not God.

Point 4: Jesus's death provides us with access to God (2:18)

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. – 2:18

Again, every spiritual blessing comes to us through the person and death of Jesus Christ.

The point is we have access to the Father. Hebrews 4:14-16 draws this out well.

*Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. – **Hebrews 4:14-16***

Because of destruction of property and imprisonment and physical assault and verbal abuse, the Christians were tempted to give up their faith. What's supposed to keep them going?

1. They have a high priest (Jesus) who died and rose again, taking the full penalty of their sins upon himself.
2. They have a high priest, because he himself was tempted, yet without sin, who sympathizes with us in our struggle against sin.
3. Because we have this high priest, we have access to God who dispenses present grace in our struggles.

We have access to God's resources!

Application

Where do you lack? Call upon God. Where are you tempted? Call upon God. Where are you miserable over your sin? Call upon God. Where are you spiritually apathetic? Call upon God for zeal. Where are you confused? Call upon God for wisdom. Where are you struggling to love a brother or sister in Christ? Call upon God.

God's resources are immeasurable. God's resources are sufficient. Approach the Father.

Gospel

If you're exploring Christianity, the buzzword is reconciliation. The greatest problem in all of life is a ruptured relationship with God! We've learned that God makes peace with his enemies through the death of Jesus Christ. We've learned that everyone is by nature an enemy of God. We have a sin problem! We've also learned that God is merciful. Every sinner who comes to God through Jesus Christ will experience total forgiveness of sins and become an heir of the promises of God.

We can't fix ourselves. We can't remove our sins. We can't merit God's mercy. Only Jesus can take our sins away. Turn to Jesus in faith and repentance. Turn from doing life your own way by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. Tell me if you do.

God doesn't just save us so we can go to heaven. He does save us to experience God's kindness forever and ever. But God also saves us for community. To live out our faith with others who believe from various backgrounds. We're saved for community. Turn to Christ and join yourselves to his church.