

Peace-Making Grace, Pt 2: The Application of Reconciliation (Ephesians 2:14-17)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on June 5, 2011

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Mosab Hassan Yousef writes, in his book *Son of Hamas*:

‘Peace in the Middle East has been the holy grail of diplomats, prime ministers, and presidents for more than five decades. Every new face on the world state thinks he or she is going to be the one to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. And each one fails just as miserably and completely as those who have come before.

The fact is, few Westerners can come close to understanding the complexities of the Middle East and its people. But I do... You see, I am a son of that region and of that conflict. I am a child of Islam and the son of an accused terrorist [Sheik Hassan Yousef – co-founder and leader of Hamas] ...I witnessed the behind-the-scenes dealings of top Middle Eastern leaders who make headlines around the world. I was trusted at the highest levels of Hamas, and I participated in the so-called Intifada ... I am part of one of the most religious Islamic families in the Middle East ...

In July 2008, I sat in a restaurant [with a Jewish]...journalist with *Haaretz* newspaper in Israel. I told him my story of becoming a Christian [!] because I wanted the news to come from Israel, not from the West. It appeared in his [Jewish Israeli] newspaper under the headline “Prodigal Son.”...It is my greatest hope that, in telling my own story, I will show my own people – Palestinian followers of Islam who have been used by corrupt regimes for hundreds of years – that the truth can set them free.

I tell my story as well to let the Israeli people know that there is hope. If I, the son of a terrorist organization dedicated to the extinction of Israel, can reach a point where I not only learned to love the Jewish people but risked my life for them, there is ... hope [in interview he said he hoped to marry a Jewish Christian]... My story holds a message for Christians too ... If we are going to represent Jesus to the world, we have to live his message of love’¹

¹⁴ *For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,* ¹⁵ *by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,* ¹⁶ *and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.* ¹⁷ *AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;*

The word *peace* appears 4x in v. 14-17, an obvious key word in our text. At the end of v. 15 and start of v. 16, *peace* and *reconcile* are linked (like hymn “*peace* on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners *reconciled*”). We spent last week looking at the historical enmity/hostility between Jews and Gentiles (if you weren’t here, I would encourage you to get that message). For this week I want to conclude this section by looking at the *peace* Christ established at the cross, and in the gospel He preached to near and far, Jew and Gentile, and show how God intends us to apply this gospel today, for the unsaved as well as the saved. “Tell them the gospel again” – that’s Paul’s pattern in the NT, telling the gospel again and again to believers and then telling them how it applies in their daily lives.

As we prepare our hearts for communion, I want us to consider:

1. **God's Peace and Reconciliation in the Gospel**
2. **Our Personal Application of the Gospel**

Verse 17 is a paraphrase of Isaiah 57:19, which says “*Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near,*” *Says the LORD*’

Isaiah 52:7 *How lovely on the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who announces peace And brings good news of happiness, Who announces salvation ...*

[Romans applies that to evangelism of far off Gentiles]

Isaiah 9:6 *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulders; And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.* [there will be no peace w/out Him]

Micah 5 prophecies Jews would be in the midst of Gentiles and the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, Micah 5:5 “*This One will be our peace.*” Eph 2:14 says of the Christ “*He Himself is our peace.*” When Messiah was born in Bethlehem, the angels announced to shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night: “*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace toward men on whom His favor rests*” (or in whom He is well-pleased, not KJV mere “good-will”)

Eph. 2:17 says peace was preached/proclaimed to both near and far ... the gospels use the word “near” for the shepherds (“*now there were shepherds nearby, keeping watch over their flocks*”) and they also speak of Magi who came from a far-off country in the East to worship the newborn King of the Jews born in Bethlehem, and the Magi quote from Micah 5 (which called the Messiah “*our peace*”). Jesus the Prince of Peace was not just King for the Jews, but for all who would come to worship Him, from near or far (Jews in nearby fields or Gentile wise men from far-off Iraq or Iran area or beyond). The far-off were brought near (v. 13) by the Prince of Peace. A 19th century poet on how near He brought us, how amazing it is:

So near, so very near to God, Nearer I could not be;
For in the person of His Son, I am as near as He.
So dear, so very dear to God, I could not dearer be;
The love wherewith He loves His Son, Such is His love to me.

Eph 2:4 says because of God's great love, God made us alive with Christ, v. 5, and then v. 6 says God “*raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ...*”

Zechariah 9:9 (NIV) *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*¹⁰ ... *He will proclaim peace to the nations.* [or Gentiles, very similar language to Eph 2:17] *His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.*¹¹ *As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners...*[prophecy of Christ, cross]¹⁶ *The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people ...*

So when Jesus comes riding on a colt into Jerusalem in Luke 19, it says in v. 37 “*the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully...³⁸ shouting “BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; **Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!**”* [This must be the King Zechariah promised w/ peace from heaven! But Zechariah also prophesied the Shepherd would be struck, i.e. die, and that’s what the One riding the donkey would do that week]:

After Jesus lays down His life for His sheep and is resurrected, the first words He says to them is “**Peace be with you.** And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, “**Peace be with you ...**” After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “**Peace be with you.**” (John 20:19-21, 26). By the cross He established peace.

That’s the historical background to Eph 2:15-16, but what about v. 17? When did Jesus preach peace to those who were “far off” (i.e., Gentiles or outsiders, excluded from Israel, as defined by v. 12-13)

- He proclaimed to a Samaritan woman and her village the peace of salvation in Messiah, which many received (Jn 4)
- He told a woman considered unclean and excluded from Israel “*your faith has saved you. Go in peace*” (Luke 8:48)
- He tells a Canaanite woman “*your faith is great,*” when she comes begging for bread/grace but rebukes Jewish disciples for “little faith” over bread (compare Mt 15:28 and 16:8)
- His gospel included women they excluded: “*wherever the gospel is proclaimed this woman will be spoken of*” (26:13)
- He speaks to women who Jewish culture excluded from the family of faith and calls them *daughter* (i.e., in His family)

Don’t ever let anyone tell you the message of Christ/Christianity is oppressive to women because apostles and preachers/elders are male and so we need feminism and women’s liberation! Jesus is the true Liberator of women in the gospel, not so they can take the role of men in the home or church, but Jesus frees women from the way their world thinks and the way our world thinks to be what He created them to be in godly femininity alongside godly masculinity

In Gal. 3:28, just a few pages earlier if you want to turn ... : *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Within that spiritual equality, there can be differences in function or role (ex: God calls Elders to different role than deacons, wives to different roles than husbands), but we’re spiritually equal/united. Husband and wife are one flesh. The church is similarly one body; unity with a diversity of ethnicity, backgrounds, gifts, with equality – not a uniformity or fleshly similarity, but peace, harmony, unity.

There's a wonderful snapshot of the early church's peace in Acts 9:31: *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed **peace, being built up**; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, **it continued to increase**.*

To some degree, Jesus proclaimed peace to far off peoples/Gentiles (ex: Roman centurion who He commends his faith, a Gentile leper who worships Jesus truly, etc.) but many writers think Eph 2:17 goes beyond His earthly ministry to the preaching of Christ in the book of Acts, where the Lord preaches through the Spirit/apostles. Ex: Acts 10:35 Peter says "***in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.***"³⁶ "*The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, **preaching peace through Jesus Christ** ...*"⁴² "*And He ordered us to preach to the people ...* (in other words, the peace of Christ continues to be preached by His servants through His Spirit, and He calls us to practice what He preaches]

Which leads us from God's Reconciliation and Peace (point #1) to

2. Our Personal Application of the Gospel

Jesus also preached peace/reconciliation for human relationships. This passage is not just about what Christ preached or produced in the past, at the cross. We have a responsibility in the present to proclaim and present and preserve what Christ has done in the past.

Look again at the middle of v. 15: "*so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus **establishing peace,***"¹⁶ *and might reconcile them both in one body **to God** through the cross...* Both Jew and Gentile, all sinners, needed to be reconciled *to God*. Peace with God is the only way they have peace with each other, but even for those God has regenerated, redeemed, reconciled, it is still our continual need to "*pursue peace*" as Heb 12:14 commands

In the end of Ephesians 6, at the end of the book, Paul says in 6:23: "***Peace** be to the brethren ...*"²⁴ *Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ...*" Paul began Ephesians saying "Grace to you and peace ..." and he ends the book *grace and peace* as well. And right in the center of the book, if you look at chapter 4, Paul tells us who have received God's saving grace and peace to be in 4:3 *diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*

God produces unity and peace, but God's people are to preserve it. We are to preserve, pursue, proclaim, peace and unity of the Spirit. How?

¹ *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,* ² *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,* ³ *being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ...* ³² *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, [as much as they deserve it?] just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. [undeserved grace!]*

You may say, "well I don't hate that person, I'm not angry at them, I don't know that I haven't forgiven them ..." but I would suggest to you one way to know you actually have forgiven them (2nd half of v. 32) is by whether the 1st half of the verse is true of you: are tender-hearted toward that person, showing kindness toward them?

God doesn't count sins against His family members, and we're not supposed to. We're to forgive as freely and fully as God did us. In fact, peace with God is the basis for our peace with other believers. Our reconciliation with others shows God has reconciled us. If God has reconciled us to Himself, despite our massive many offenses against God, we can and must reconcile within His body, despite the offenses we have against each other (far lesser sins).

Turn to Mark 11. What do we do when we're offended by another? The best way to deal with most offenses is not to take offense. But what if you have, and you have something against someone? "I'm not bitter," you protest, "I'm just bothered about what they did, I just have something against them, but I'm not angry or hateful, and I don't need to forgive them, I just have an issue with so-and-so."

Jesus says in Mark 11:25 "*if you have **anything** against **anyone***" (that's pretty all-inclusive, and in English vernacular we could say "whoever you've got 'issues with,' whoever you're bothered by, whoever you've got problems with, whoever comes to mind" ... and maybe someone is coming to your mind this very moment)

²⁵ "*Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone ...*" [in your daily prayers, the idea is there's only you and God, not you and the other person, *forgive* – present tense, continual confession and a continual heart forgiveness in prayer before God and with God's help to forgive. You know you're there like Eph 4:32 explains, when you have a tender-heart toward them and when you are being kind to them, forgiving like Christ did, having the heart of Christ toward those crucifying Him literally]

Your relational forgiveness with God in some way is related to the way you forgive others as you pray. Remember Matthew 6? You can turn there. Many of you know it by heart. "Jesus, teach us to pray," the disciples ask, and Jesus give the so-called Lord's Prayer.

v. 12 "*forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*" (if you memorized it "debts," just know that it has the idea of sins, as you can compare with the parallel in Luke 11:4). [idea: "God forgive me just like I'm forgiving others"]

And then in v. 14 right after He concludes the prayer with "Amen"

¹⁴ "*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* ¹⁵ *But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Your relational forgiveness from your Father in heaven is related to your human relationships and forgiveness of others in prayer! This text is not saying you fall in and out of God's family when it takes you awhile to forgive someone (this text says God is still "your Father" the whole time) but the Father-child relationship is hindered by your sin of failing to forgive others when you pray.

I will always be the father of my children, their sin doesn't change my fatherhood of them, but it does change fellowship. *If you don't forgive men their trespasses*, Jesus said, *neither will your Father forgive you* [i.e., relational Father-child fellowship reconciliation].

If we confess our sins, 1 John 1:9 says, *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* [that is continual prayers for forgiveness to keep continual fellowship - Christian life is a lifestyle of repentance, reconciling, forgiveness]

If you're unwilling or unable to forgive, that shows a problem deeper than your relational problem with that person. It shows one who doesn't understand God's forgiveness and possibly has not received God's forgiveness. A continual hard heart may evidence an unchanged heart, an unsaved person. To be clear: we are not saved by works or what we do, but God works in the hearts of those He's saved and changed within so they can and will forgive, and if you won't, don't be so sure you know God's forgiveness. *If you love me*, Jesus said, *you will do what I command*. That doesn't mean it's not hard, or that we won't fail what we try, but a saved heart tries to obey and wants to, unlike the unrepentant hard heart. In Mt 18:35 judgment falls on those who won't forgive in the heart.

If your heart is hard, unrepentant, unchanged by grace, this is the day to repent and be changed. Ask God for forgiveness for your lack of forgiveness. Call on His grace to change your heart even if the other person or your circumstance never change; God's grace is greater than your lack of grace. If you have not yet surrendered to the Prince of Peace, fall on your face and plead with Him for grace and God can reconcile you to Himself and save you by His mercy.

5:7 *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”* [recipients of God's saving mercy manifest it to their fellow man, not to earn mercy, but as an evidence of mercy at work within us – once God has been merciful to you, you can and will to others]

5:9 *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.* [The ministry of the Son of God as Prince of Peace / Peace-maker continues through His followers carrying on His message. We're never more like Jesus then when we are “peacemakers.”]

This Greek word translated “peacemakers” was ‘used of ambassadors commissioned to negotiate peace with alienated parties, a task which called for enterprise and effort’² to reconcile.

In Christ, there should be no such thing as “irreconcilable differences.” So what do you do if you have differences or issues with a brother? Peace-making starts in the heart, as we read earlier in Mark 11:25, but it moves out in action. First, when you're praying, anytime you pray, if you haven't fully forgiven in your heart, or if your mind keeps bringing up or dwelling on something somebody did to you, if something keeps bothering you your spirit against another, Jesus commands you to first forgive in your heart at that moment. Do not hold on to hurts or harbor grudges or bitterness toward the person.

For us, sin has already been punished by Christ on the cross and you don't need to punish a fellow believer for their sin by your actions or attitudes. You need to first deal with those things in your heart as you pray, forgive, and the force of Mark 11:25 suggests *continue*. If the person is not yet saved, pray in sincere love for that

That doesn't mean it ends with prayer. What if the sin has caused a breach in relationship or fellowship, esp. with a believer? What if you know a brother/sister in Christ has something against you?

Mt 5:23 ... *if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that **your brother has something against you,** ²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and **go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come** and present your offering.*

The context is worship: if reconciliation between you and a brother needs to take place, *go*, initiate, don't wait, humble yourself and ask forgiveness (even if it was a misunderstanding and what they have against you shouldn't have been an offense). Do what you can not to take offense at others and to clear up any offenses you know your fellow Christians have against you. *Go*, Jesus says, and *you seek out* reconciliation and restoration, before you worship. The Lord took the initiative with us to bring reconciliation about, and the same Lord will give grace for us to do that with others.

If someone has sinned against you, Jesus says "go" later in chapter 18, and humbly tentatively tell him/her in private, is the idea of the original text, just between the two of you. Either way, you are to go and seek to be reconciled. If it's something you can just forbear, like Eph 4:2, and just forgive in your heart, like Mark 11:25 says, when you talk to God about it, that's great. But don't go and talk to others about your offenses, talk to God. If you do talk to someone about your offense, the first person needs to be the one who caused offense, and in some cases they didn't mean to cause the offense.

If your repeated attempts to reconcile and restore your relationship one-on-one fail, then if the person is continually in clear sin, you can talk to others to enlist spiritual mature believer's help with you, like Jesus taught. Gal 6:1 says "*in a spirit of gentleness, taking heed that you are not also tempted.*" Talk to that person in loving concern, not in a condemning self-righteousness, but like Eph 4:32: kind, tender-hearted, forgiving,

Turn to Rom. 14. Paul gives further unity instructions to the church. Sometimes we have differences of opinion, different views of what is right or best, disagreements that aren't on core doctrines, but our controversies don't have to lead to condemning judging.

Romans 14:10 *But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, **why do you regard your brother with contempt?** ... [we can have concern w/out having contempt, disagreement w/out disdain] ... ¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—**not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.** [don't just say, well they need to get over it and not take offense, if you can minimize offense, by all means do]*

... ¹⁵ *For if because of food your brother is hurt [food is the context but it applies to other areas], you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and **peace** and joy in the Holy Spirit. [there's the peace we began with, a fruit of God's Spirit]*

... ¹⁹ *So then we **pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.***

12:3 *For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you **not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think ...***

... ¹⁰ *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor ...*

What if someone is mean to me, or is even persecuting me?

¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

[But what if what they did is evil? They need consequences, man! There are authorities for that, Rom. 13, but for you personally ...]

¹⁷ ***Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.*** ¹⁸ ***If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*** [v. 19 says don't get back, v. 20 says get a bag lunch for them or a bunch of cookies. Don't get furious at them, get food for them, i.e., do good to them, like the end of Mt 5 where Jesus says "*love your enemies...pray for them...greet them*"]

Brothers and sisters, there is no issue our sufficient Word and our sufficient Savior doesn't have help for, if we'll humble ourselves before the gospel of peace-making grace and do what Christ says.

¹ Mosab Hassan Yousef, *Son of Hamas* (Saltriver; reprint edition, 2011), p. xiii, 5, 243, 247.

² John Blanchard, "God's Peace Corps," in *The Beatitudes for Today* (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 1996), 222.