

**Christmas Letters**  
**“Jesus Is Peace for the Hostile”**  
**Ephesians 2:11-22**

Have you received a Christmas letter yet? So far, we have received only one but I am sure more will come. I love receiving Christmas letters and especially the letters that come with pictures. It is encouraging to hear the stories of what has gone on in people’s lives over the past year. Christmas time is certainly a time to reflect on life and all that has happened. Yet the true meaning Christmas is lost when we get caught up in the commercial side of Christmas and fail to reflect on the true gift that was given in Christ.

The Christmas season is a time to reflect on one of the most precious doctrines in Christianity—the incarnation. The doctrine of the incarnation is the heart of Christmas. The incarnation is the biblical doctrine of how Christ, the second person of the Trinity took on human flesh. In the incarnation we celebrate Christ’s coming as a baby in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. Yet, the incarnation is much more than a baby in a manger.

J. I. Packer writes about the incarnation, *“The incarnational principle is that when the Son took to himself all the powers and capacities for experience that belong to human nature and began to live through his human body, mind, and identity; his sense of being the Father’s Son was unaffected, and he knew and did his Father’s will, aided by the Spirit, at all times. It was with his own will and his own love mirroring the Father’s [will], therefore, that he took the place of human sinners exposed to divine judgment and laid down his life as a sacrifice for them, entering fully into the state and experience of death that was due to them. Then he rose from death to reign by the Father’s appointment in the kingdom of God and from his throne to send the Spirit to induce faith in himself and in the saving work he had done, to communicate forgiveness and pardon, justification and adoption to the [repentant], and to unite all believers to himself to share his risen life in foretaste of the full life of heaven that is to come.”*<sup>1</sup>

Here is what we must remember: At the heart of incarnation is the atoning work of Christ. So, the heart of Christmas is not a Christmas tree with ornaments hanging on it but the bloody body of the Son of God hanging on an old rugged cross. He was as innocent, pure, and holy when He hung on the cross as He was the day He laid in a manger and as He was when He was in Heaven.

Our Christmas series this year is called: Christmas Letters. We are looking in the letters of the Apostle Paul at the gifts that Christ gave us through His incarnation. On this second Sunday of Advent we are reminded of another gift Jesus gave us by His coming—peace with God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

While there is a lot of rich truth in Ephesians 2:11-22, what I want to do is put a laser on the doctrine of the incarnation and show from this passage how it makes Christ’s atoning work the ground of our peace with God.

Last Sunday Steve Vardeman preached Ephesians 2:1-10 and we saw that through the incarnation Jesus purchased the gift of grace for the spiritually dead. This morning in vv. 11-22 we will see how Jesus purchased the gift of peace for the hostile toward God. Yet, here is the deal, it is not that some are hostile toward God and some are not. Everyone is born separated from God by their sin and therefore hostile toward God. Here is the main point of the sermon: *Jesus died in our place and for our sin even while we were enemies with God therefore the ground of our peace with God and with our fellow believers is the atonement of Jesus.*

**1. Our rebellious opposition to God was grounded in our spiritual death (vv. 11-12)**

- a. *“Therefore remember”*: Paul uses the word *“therefore”* a lot in his writing. He will often conclude his arguments with *“therefore do this or do that”*. This is his way of making application to the gospel.

In this case, he says, *“therefore remember”*. To *remember* is the application. He often calls us to *remember* important truths because remembering biblical truth changes us from the heart.

He called the Ephesian church to *“remember that they were God’s workmanship”*. He called them to remember how wonderful it is to be a Christian and how wonderful they are. Right? Isn’t that what he said?

No, it is not. Actually vv. 11-22 began the whole argument he made in vv. 1-10 all over. Instead of talking about how wonderful they were, he reminded them that they were dead in their trespasses and he reminded them how they were hostile toward God.

He actually called them to remember the bad news about their condition before Jesus had saved them. He said . . .

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<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, 22. Also published in *NB: News*, British UCCF’s house magazine in 2007. Over the years, J. I. Packer has written some very help articles and essays that explain penal substitutionary atonement. Christians will benefit from reading his works on the atonement. The little book *In My Place Condemned He Stood* compiles many of these articles and essays into one work along with an excellent chapter on the atonement by Mark Dever. I commend this book to you as a feast for your soul.

- b. They were “*separated from Christ*”: NKJV says, “*without Christ*”; although he was talking to the Gentiles, Israel had been told this same thing by Isaiah the prophet, “*but your sins have made a separation between you and your God.*” Being separated from Christ is not simply a Gentile condition or a Jewish condition but is the basic human condition from birth.
- c. They were “*alienated from the commonwealth of Israel*”: The word *alienated* does not simply mean an alien but a *hostile alien*. It is in a very real sense an enemy. The word *commonwealth* is the same word for *citizen*. This is going to be important later as Paul concludes his argument but for now what we find is a person who is not a *citizen* of God’s kingdom and not only that it is a person who is *hostile toward God*.
- d. They were “*strangers to the covenants of promise*”: This phrase is pretty straight forward. The Gentiles were not part of the covenants of promise nor did they even have knowledge of them. They were clueless and so far away from any right knowledge of God that they were in a hopeless condition. Which, by the way, is what we see in the next phrase.
- e. They had “*no hope*”: Paul is piling phrase upon phrase to define the hopeless condition of the Gentile believer prior to their faith in Christ. You see in order to appreciate and love the good news of the person and work of Christ we must have an accurate grasp of the bad news.

In our day, the problem is we live in a culture that finds the bad news about ourselves hard to believe. It is too negative. Yet, we must have our thinking retrained by the word of God. We can proclaim “Jesus saves!” all we want but if we do not define what *Jesus saves from and why He saves* then it really makes no sense to people. People have to understand they are in a hopeless condition prior to Jesus saving them and Christians must *remember that they were once in a hopeless condition*. What was that condition?

- f. They were “*without God in the world*”: Verse 12 begins and ends defining what we were without. As the NKJV says, we were *without Christ and without God in the world*. You may be here and without Christ and without God in the world and wonder what the big deal is but trust me—it is a big deal. It is a dangerous place in which to live life without God. Living life without God is a horrible condition. If you die separated from God you will spend eternity in Hell experiencing the full wrath of God.

## 2. God’s provision of peace is grounded in the Redeemer’s death (vv. 13-18)

- a. Our rebellious opposition to God was grounded in our spiritual death (vv. 1-3) but our provision for peace with God is grounded in our Redeemer’s death on our behalf.
- b. Verse 13: The ground of our peace with God came through the death of the Son of God. I want you to notice how the incarnation is at the heart of our peace with God. Look at v. 13, *in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ*.
  - i. Who are the ones who were far off? (v. 12) *the separated, alienated, strangers, having no hope and without God in the world*.
  - ii. How were they brought near? By the blood of Christ. This means that Jesus had to come from Heaven and become fully human. He had to have a real body so that He could die on the cross in our place and for our hostility toward God.
- c. We hear the language again in v. 14. Because He came in the flesh and broke down the dividing wall of hostility between us and God and between the races and ethnicities we have peace with God and one another.
- d. Verse 15 says the way He broke down the dividing wall of hostility and He abolished it. The Greek word for *abolished* is to *destroy*. He destroyed it by being destroyed on the cross under the wrath of God for our sin of breaking God’s laws and ordinances that separated both Jew and Gentile.

What once separated us now unites but because neither Jew nor Gentile look to the Law for life but instead look to Christ for life. He is our life. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life and no one comes to the Father except through Him. *Therefore, now those who have come to God by trusting Christ as their salvation now have peace with God and so we are now united in Christ as one man*.

- e. Verse 16 tells us that Jesus killed the hostility between us and God by being killed on the cross.

The Greek word for *reconcile* in v. 16 and Greek word for *alienated* in v. 12 have the same root word. Paul uses this word to show how the death of Christ made peace between two parties that were at enmity and hostile toward one another.

Again, our provision for peace is grounded in the death of Christ. Normally for two warring parties to have peace one must conquer the other. But just because one party is conquered and submits to the other that does not mean there is real peace. Those conquered can still hate those who conquered them.

Christ's death did something altogether different than we could ever do to have peace with God. When Jesus submitted to the Father's will, He took our punishment for our rebellion and purchased peace through His death on the cross. When He paid for our sin He did more than simply end hostilities. He purchased life changing grace that changes us from the inside out and creates in us a love for God. This love for God comes from being made alive to God through Christ's death.

f. Verses 17-18 . . .

### 3. Our redeemed position of peace with God is grounded in the Redeemer's life (vv. 19-22)

- a. When Paul says, "*So then*" he is concluding his argument that began in vv. 11-12 when he said "*remember.*" *Remember* really is his point in vv. 19-22. *Remember that you are no longer* . . .
- b. These verses are written in the *present tense*, this means that Jesus is not a dead Savior but a living Cornerstone, we are joined with a living structure, and a living holy temple.

#### Conclusion/Application:

We find two kinds of peace that Jesus purchased by His incarnation in the text: First: *vertical peace: peace with God* and Second: *horizontal peace: peace with other followers of Christ*. Vertical peace is the grace that comes from God because we are filled with the Spirit of God and this grace feeds the horizontal peace so that we strive for peace with other followers of Jesus. Since God initiated peace with us when we were His enemies and in opposition to Him how can we not strive to be at peace with other followers of Jesus.

The focus of vv. 11-22 is the peace we have with God and the peace we have in the church as a result of our union with Christ. It is not that we do not strive for peace with those outside the body of Christ, we certainly do but that is a *one-way striving*.

God certainly has commissioned us to love our neighbors and enemies but there are no guarantees unbelievers will desire peace with Christians. Some certainly do not. Never the less, Christians have experienced the grace of the gospel that comes from the person and work of Christ so there is grace and the Spirit implanted deeply in both hearts. This grace brings us together to cause us to strive to live together in peace and also commissions us to live in peace with unbelievers as well. Let me conclude with three points of applications.

- First and most important, the death of our hostility with God is grounded in the death of Christ. Jesus is our peace with God. What this means is that those who come to God through faith and repentance of their sins in Jesus Christ find that God came in Christ to reconcile them to Himself. God sending His Son to the cross to die on behalf of those who sinned against Him is not divine child abuse but what we learn from the word of God is that this was the plan of God designed by the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—the Trinity.

Without the Trinity there is no salvation for anyone—ever! Salvation can only be provided for by a Trinitarian God. In other words, God came in Christ, lived a life of perfect obedience to the Law of God by the power of the Holy Spirit and then died on the cross to pay for the sins of those He created who were unable to keep His Laws and covenants. Then God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit gave life to God the Son to defeat death thereby killing the hostility between God and man. Friends Jesus died to bring you to God. He came and has preached peace to you but if you reject His salvation then you will die separated from God, alienated from Him, hostile toward Him, a child of wrath under the wrath of God and will spend eternity in Hell. Friend, you do not know the number of your days. Do not wait. Do not miss the great salvation that has come in Jesus.

I would love to talk with you today . . . If you are a lady visiting with us and would like to visit with one of our ladies then they would be willing to talk with you as well.

- Second, the death of our hostility with God in the death of Christ is the ground of peace in the church. It does not mean we will never disagree. It does not mean we will never have problems. It does not mean we will never sin against one another.

We will still struggle with sin and we will sin against one another but we must remember our brothers and sisters in Christ are not our enemies. We must remember that the ground of our peace is that Christ died for us while we were still enemies with God.

In Ephesians 4:30, Paul calls the church to be kind to one another and to forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you. We would do well to not only give one another the benefit of the doubt but to forgive one another when we are sinned against.

It does not mean we do not confront and discuss some difficult issues that offend. We certainly do but that discussion is done in the spirit and by remembering that the ground of our peace with one another is in the death of the

Son of God because of our sin. He purchased our peace with God and also our peace with one another and His being buried left our hostility in the grave when He rose from the dead.

- Third, the death of our hostility with God in the death of Christ is the ground of peace in our families. Many of you will be spending time with family over the holidays. I don't know your family situation but I look back at mine over the years and this has often been a stressful time for me.

So, how can the death of hostility in the death of Christ be our ground for peace in our families this holiday season? First, *remember* as you once were—many of your family members are. Many of your most difficult family members are probably not Christians. So, *remember* they are like you used to be, spiritually dead, separated from Christ, hostile toward God and you represent Him so that makes you the target. Here is what you need to remember, they may never admit they have no hope but you can bet when they lay their heads on their pillows at night there is no peace in their hearts and this is because they are without God in this big, difficult, dark world. So, *remember*, as you once were—they are and the Holy Spirit will use this to grow your compassion for them.

Second, rejoice that you belong to the One who stepped out of heaven and lived the life you should have lived. He knows what it means to be treated with hostility by His own people and to be marginalized by His own family and yet, although He was God in the flesh, He took it from them and then died on the cross for them in order to reconcile them to God. He did this for them and He did this for you in order to bring you near to Him so that you are no longer a stranger or an alien but a fellow citizen with all the saints and a member of His family. It may be that you have to remember that while there is not much peace in your biological family that in your church family you are members of the household of God.

Also, you may need to remember this Christmas that your wife or your husband or your kids or your extended family are not your enemies. Paul said later in Ephesians 6 that we do not wrestle with flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil in this present darkness. It may feel like they are your enemies but remember they are not and so do not treat them as such.

Finally, I want to show you how to remember [v.17]. You will need to preach. Preach to your heart the truths of the gospel and then, if given the opportunity, preach it in the prayers you pray in your gatherings, with your friends and family members at Christmas. You may never get to have a gospel conversation at Christmas but if you are like me your friends and family know you are a Christian and they will ask you to pray so take the time to pray the gospel in your prayer. It is powerful to do that. Preach the gospel in season and out of season and preach it to yourself for it is the ground of your peace with God.