

Jesus, Our Peace

by Alan Martin

This sermon delves into Ephesians 2:11-18, highlighting the shift from the old covenant of physical circumcision and Jewish exclusivity to the new covenant of spiritual circumcision and unity in Christ. It emphasizes how Jesus, through His sacrifice, abolished the division between Jew and Gentile, offering peace and access to God for all who believe in Him. The sermon explores the significance of the tearing of the temple veil at Jesus' crucifixion, symbolizing the removal of barriers between humanity and God, leading to a new era of direct access to the Father through faith in Christ.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:13, Galatians 5:6, Hebrews 9:11, Romans 8:3, John 3:16, Ephesians 2:14, Ephesians 2:17

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Access to God"

Description

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Transcript

Ephesians 2, 11 through 18 is the passage. Let me read it for you. Ephesians 2, 11 through 18.

Therefore remember that formerly you who are Gentiles in the flesh, so obviously Paul's writing to a predominantly Gentile church in there in Ephesus. You were Gentiles in the flesh and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves a circumcision. Now who would those be? Who calls themselves a circumcision? The Jews.

Jewish people do. And the circumcision done by human hand. Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, alienated from citizenship in Israel, and strangers to the covenant of the promise, not having hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made both one and destroyed the barrier, the middle wall of hostility by annulling or rendering inoperative in his flesh the law with its commands and decrees. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in 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 are far away, the Gentiles, and peace to those who were near, the Jews. For through him we both have access to the Father by one spirit. So just like the circumcision was prominent in the scriptures that Larry read to us just a moment ago, circumcision was the physical sign, the physical sign of the covenant that God had with the people of Abraham in Genesis 17 9 through 11.

Someone read that for me. Genesis 17 9 through 11. This is when God made circumcision the physical sign of the covenant he had with his people.

God said to Abraham, as for you, you will keep my covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations. God said to Abraham, as for you, well, it's the same. Keep going.

This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your seed after you. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin.

It will be a token of the covenant between me and you. And Abraham hearing this is an example of what the scripture means being quick to hear. Does anybody know how Abraham responded with the scripture says? How did Abraham respond to this instruction from God? That day and himself.

I bet he did himself last, don't you think? It would be kind of painful if you started with yourself and they did everyone else. But that's obedience. He heard God say something.

And this would be the sign of the covenant between God and his people. It was so stringent that God said any male who was not circumcised would be cut off. It'd be excluded from citizenship in Israel.

Now, Jewish parents circumcise their boys. So in essence, you're born a Jew and you don't have much say so about it. The Jewish parents generally circumcise their sons on the eighth day.

They usually have a Shaul, a rabbi do it. The baby has no choice. So you're literally born a Jew.

It's chosen for you by the parents, your birth parents. And if you're a Jewish girl, you're a Jewish girl. It's not a choice you make.

Now, it was possible for a Gentile to become a Jew. But what had to happen for a Gentile to become a Jew? What do you think? Had to be circumcised. But the thing is, once you became circumcised, it wasn't just you.

You and every male in your house, if you had servants, all the male servants, every male had to be circumcised. And then once you became circumcised, you basically became a Jew. And you had to live just like if you were born a Jew.

You had to keep the entire law just like the rest of the Jewish people did. And such a person is called a proselyte in the Bible. You'll see it used in the Book of Acts.

Many devout Jews and proselytes. That means Gentiles who had been circumcised and were living like Jews. Because only a proselyte, a Gentile who had become circumcised, could even offer sacrifices.

Other Gentiles couldn't even come near the temple. You weren't allowed. You had to be circumcised to approach the temple of God.

It was a Jewish temple because He was the God of the Jewish people. We'll talk more about that. Now, it's important to remember, circumcision is not what made a person righteous.

It was a sign of the covenant that they had with God. Romans 4, verses 9-12. Sam Serta, do you mind reading Romans 4, 9-12? We say that faith was how then was accounted when he was in circumcision, uncircumcision, not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

He received the sign of circumcision, the seal of the righteousness of the faith, which he had while he was in uncircumcision. Okay, that's good. You can stop right there.

See, Abraham was justified by faith while he was still uncircumcised. Abraham did not become circumcised until he was 99 years old. It was close to 80 years old when Abraham looked up, believed God, and it was accounted unto him as righteousness there in Genesis chapter 15.

So, he was righteous in God's eyes through faith before he was circumcised, but circumcised was the sign that he trusted God, that he chose to be a follower of God. And when God told Abraham to be circumcised, he gave him this instruction, walk before me and be blameless, and receive this sign. And so, all the descendants of Abraham are circumcised to show that they are in covenant with the God of Israel.

Now, this issue of circumcision and the Jewish understanding that you could not even approach the temple of God unless you were circumcised caused a great controversy in the early church for the Gentiles. But in the temple, there was a court for the Gentiles. Yes, you could observe from a distance.

You could sit out, it's called the outer court. You couldn't offer sacrifices. You couldn't actually enter into the main temple area, but you could sit in the bleachers, the crow's nest, and you could kind of watch what was going on, but you couldn't go near yourself.

You weren't a part of Israel. You weren't a part of the covenant. You had to sit on the outside.

And the Jews felt so strongly about this idea of circumcision and what God told Abraham that when Gentile believers began to put their faith and become followers of Christ, what do you think the devout Jews told them they had to do? Circumcise. They immediately started telling them, Hey, we need to get all of these Gentile believers circumcised and keeping the law of Moses. That's how they saw it.

They were sincerely convinced that that's the way it had to be. But thankfully, the apostle Paul said, Uh uh. Paul would not have it.

And he resisted it. And it caused such a debate that they had to call the main leaders of the church together. And you can read about this in Acts chapter 15.

And it says they convened a council of the apostles and the church leaders and they discussed this. And there was argument. The devout Jews were saying the Gentiles must be circumcised and made to keep the law of Moses.

And Paul and Barnabas said no. And Peter even gave his testimony that when he was at Cornelius, the Gentiles' house, that man, the Holy Spirit fell upon them while they were still uncircumcised. Anyway, at that church council in Jerusalem, it said it seemed good to all the leadership and to the Holy Spirit that the

Gentiles not be required to be circumcised.

You can read about it. Not that it settled the matter. It continually dogged the apostle Paul the rest of his ministry because Jews just felt so strongly about this.

But they had a basic misunderstanding because it wasn't just a controversy in the early church. It's still a controversy now. 2,000 years later, the idea of circumcision and keeping the law of Moses is still a controversy.

Have you ever heard that, hey, how come we don't worship on the Sabbath? The Sabbath is Saturday. And this is Sunday. How come we worship on Sunday when one of the Ten Commandments is remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Sunday is not the Sabbath. This is Sunday. This is the Lord's day.

This is not Saturday. So, it's still a controversy and here's why it's a controversy and I want you to understand it because there is a basic misunderstanding of the law itself. What is that basic misunderstanding? Well, let's look back in Ephesians 2, verse 12.

Look back with me and see if you can figure it out. Ephesians 2, verse 12 says, Remember that at that time, you were separate from Christ, alienated from citizenship in Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, not having hope and without God in the world. Now, what does that mean in practical terms? God's covenant wasn't with the Gentiles.

The law of Moses given on Mount Sinai, including the Ten Commandments, were not given to the whole world. God said, speak to the sons of Israel and say to them. We better be careful adding anything to that.

You don't want to take something that was specifically spoken to one nation and make it apply to all nations. That changes the entire nature of it. And the Scripture warns about taking away or adding to what God has said.

So the law of Moses given by God to the nation of Israel was never given to the nations. That's why Paul says, you were excluded from citizenship in Israel. If you were a Gentile, you were strangers to the covenant of the promise.

Those weren't your laws. Those were laws for the Jewish people. You know, if a Jewish person deliberately broke the Sabbath, it was capital punishment.

Never for a Gentile. The Gentiles weren't told they couldn't work on Saturday. That was the Jewish people who couldn't do that.

And we better don't get that confused or else you'll get all caught up in something because you don't understand the original purpose of the law was a covenant between God and one nation, the people of Israel. And that's why Paul said this. Now, is there wisdom and understanding from studying the law? Is there benefit in seeing what this law that God gave to the people of Israel were? Absolutely.

You know how Paul considered the law? He used an interesting term. He called them the rudimentary principles of the earth. The law contains the basic elements of justice and order for society.

The way to treat animals. The way to have order and peace in your cities and in your neighborhoods. The way for authority to be governed properly.

The way women should be treated. The way servants should be treated. The way foreigners should be treated.

The basic elements of what produced a good life for order and righteousness are found in the law. Rudimentary principles. So they serve a beautiful purpose.

And we're told by the apostle Paul that the law was put into effect to lead us to Christ. So it's like the runway. It serves a purpose.

But a plane doesn't get anywhere if it only stays on the runway. It's got to take off. And the law brings us to Christ so that we can be carried by the Spirit.

Now look in Ephesians 2.13. Larry, can you read Ephesians 2.13 for us? You see why Paul keeps saying far off? Rudy brought up the court of the Gentiles. They couldn't go in the temple, but they could sit on the outside and look in. You couldn't approach God.

You couldn't even offer a sacrifice. Because the covenant wasn't with you, you weren't the chosen people. You're just the Gentiles.

Israel is the chosen people. The entire rest of the world is just the Gentiles. That kind of created some tension, by the way.

And Paul acknowledges the tension that that created. But for us, and let's look at that verse 13. But now in Christ Jesus, you who are once far away, that's the Gentiles, have been brought near to the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now, we can actually approach God Himself. In the first covenant, even the Jewish people couldn't get very close to God. Only one person could actually enter God's presence, and that only one day of year.

On the day of atonement, only the high priest could take the blood of the covenant and a censer full of coals and a fine incense billowing smoke, and he could take the censer and the blood and enter behind the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was, from the rest of the holy place, the middle chamber of the temple. Just the high priest and one day a year. But in Christ Jesus, we couldn't even approach God.

Now we've been brought near to the blood of Jesus Christ. So, and what does the blood of Jesus Christ represent? When Jesus was celebrating the Last Supper, and He lifted up, it says, after the supper He took the cup and He said, this cup is the blood of the New Covenant. Oh, and as soon as you use the word New Covenant, what does that make the first covenant? Old.

Obsolete. It's the old. And that which is old and obsolete, as soon passes away.

Because the law, Jesus said this, all the law and the prophets were until John. Until John the Baptist. Yes.

But not as they do nowadays, that the glory is obsolete. You better be careful, huh? That's a controversy, isn't it? Okay. Now, let's look at these verses, okay? Ephesians 2, 14 and 15 together.

Ephesians 2, 14 and 15. Someone want to read that? Raina, you want to read that for us? Ephesians 2, 14 and 15. Hostility.

Imity. Yeah, usually. That's right.

So, He Himself is our peace, who has made both one. Who are the both? Jew and Gentile. He's going to make both one.

Neither Gentile anymore, neither fully Jew anymore. One. One new man, making peace by His blood.

Now, what... But to do so, He had to deal with a point of hostility. There was hostility between the Jew and Gentile. You know what the hostility between the Jew and the Gentile was? The law itself.

You know what the Jew would say? We are the chosen people. God chose us. He gave us the law.

He gave us the promises. It's our Sabbath. It's our temple.

He is the God of Israel. That created an issue. That created hostility between Jews and the Gentiles.

They could tell the Gentiles, if you want to become one of us, you can. Then you can become the chosen people, like we are. It was... The law itself divided Jew and Gentile.

It created a hostility. Paul calls it the middle wall of fragmentation. It separated the Jewish people from the rest of the world.

And he told us, before we were excluded. We were foreigners to the covenant of promise. Till Christ Himself on the cross abolished.

The word is kataergon in the Greek. It means He put it to idle. He rendered it inoperative.

Jesus rendered the law inoperative. And His purpose now... So now, there's no law separating Jew and Gentile. Instead, in Himself, He creates one new man.

A son of God, born by the Holy Spirit, living by faith, loving other men. A new person, no longer Jew, no longer Gentile. That's what Jesus did.

Now, this happened at the cross, it says. And we have testimony of when it happened at the cross. Now think with me.

What happened at the cross? Jesus hung there. And it says He was crucified at the sixth hour. About nine o'clock in the morning.

But at the ninth hour, darkness came over... No, I think it's the third. About twelve o'clock. Jesus has been on the cross about three hours.

What came over the entire land? Do you remember? Darkness. It's interesting. What happened when the high priest stood, stepped behind the veil of the Holy of Holies? He had this sensor billowing smoke.

And it made the entire area dark so that he could not see the Ark of the Covenant. And so darkness came over the whole earth right at high noon. And Jesus began to make some declarations.

One of the declarations Jesus made is, it is finished. What's finished? What's coming to an end? And what did He say after that? After He said it's finished, it says He bowed His head and He did something. He gave up His spirit.

And what happened when He gave up His spirit? Well, in the specific details, you're right, but the earth, the rocks began to cry out. The earth quaked. And then, like you said, the veil of the temple, the Jewish temple for the Jewish people and their Jewish God, the barrier, the dividing wall, it suddenly, it's torn in two from... Talked about.

That's an interesting little detail. Why? Why would that detail be significant? And recorded for us. What do you think? Because I'm just giving you the opportunity to think like I did.

Why do you think the detail is important? Why from top to bottom? No more separation. Well, that's what being torn means. But why top? Why from top to bottom? Ah, because men, a group of men might be able to tear it if they pull from the bottom.

But being torn from the top meant God is the one doing the tearing. God tore it. He rent it in two.

And he said through my son, the entire world now has access to me. He created a new and living way through his son. No more wall of separation.

No more earthly temple. As a matter of fact, there's still not a temple, is there? It wasn't 80, 70, maybe 30, 35 years later, God made sure there was not even going to be a temple around. Because we don't need a temple.

We don't need a Jewish high priest. We have the true high priest which is the son of God himself. Amen.

And through his blood and the way he opened, we can come to God directly. And it's actually what the whole 9th chapter of Hebrews kind of states that. I'm going to read it for you because it's long.

Not the whole chapter. I'm going to read down from about the first verse to about verse 15. But if you want to see the beautiful symbolism of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross, spend some time in the book of Hebrews in these chapters 8, 9, 10.

But here in Hebrews 9, verse 1. Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up in its first room with a lampstand, a table with its consecrated bread. This was called the holy place.

And behind the second curtain was a room called the most holy place or the holy of holies, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna and a staff that had budded and the stone tablets of the covenant. And above the ark were the cherubim of the glory overshadowing the atonement cover.

But we cannot discuss these things in detail now. When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins of the people had committed in ignorance.

The Holy Spirit was showing by this. In other words, all of that was to show something that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed. You know why? As long as that temple was standing, the

Gentiles were on the outside.

We weren't included. So all of that was to show the separation that existed at that time. Remember what God even told His own people when He gave the law? You better not even let anyone touch the mountain.

If anyone even comes near and touches the mountain, kill them, stone them, shoot them with arrows. That creates a fear. And you know what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, says to us? Come unto Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

It's so different. What Jesus Christ brings and what the first temple represented are so different. The Holy Spirit was showing by all this that the way of the most holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning.

This is an illustration for the present time, including that the gifts and sacrifices being offered, they were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings, external regulations, applying until the time of the new order. God had something new planned.

The law and the prophets were only for a season, not forever. But when Christ came, verse 11, as the high priest of the good things that are now already here. Remember, He said, the kingdom of God is at hand.

He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands. Remember, Moses was told, you make the earthly tabernacle exactly like what I show you. What was He shown? The heavenly tabernacle.

He saw the heavenly. Jesus didn't go to the earthly temple. When He went to make sacrifice, He entered the actual heavenly tabernacle.

The one that no human hands had made. He did not enter by means of blood of goats and calves, but He entered the most holy place once and for all by His own blood, thus He obtaining eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who were ceremonially unclean sanctified them so that they were outwardly clean.

How much more then will the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God. How much better are the promises and power and grace we have through Jesus Christ than those rudimentary principles that the law contained. For this reason, Christ is a mediator of a new covenant that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

Now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. Do you know who God is to us now? God is not the God of Israel. God is not Yahweh.

God is not Elohim. God is our Father. When we approach God, we are to say Our Father.

Isn't that beautiful? I mean, talk about an invitation to come. We get to approach the throne of grace that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need. And we do so because God Himself received the sacrifice that Jesus brought of His own blood into the presence of the Father.

And He paid for all sin so that we can be received by God, the Father. Isn't that so beautiful? So, the first covenant and you need to understand this. The first covenant was based upon physical circumcision,

worshiping at a physical location, being born a Jew or having the physical sign of circumcision and living as a Jew.

That's the first covenant. But the new covenant is a spiritual covenant. We experience the covenant with God the Father through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

By grace, through faith, we receive the Holy Spirit, are born again, and become a new creation in Christ Jesus. Neither Gentile nor Jew. A son of God, a daughter of God by faith.

Living by the Spirit. And see, attempting to live a righteous life, trying to follow the instructions of the Law of Moses always led to failure. You always fell short.

But according to Paul in Romans 8, verses 3 and 4, what the Law could not do, weak as it was because of sin in the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, He condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteousness of the Law might be fully met in us who don't walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. See, by the power of the Spirit, we can live our lives. We can be kind to our neighbor.

We can live in love and unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We can do what's right. We can live those basic principles, pleasing God, and dwelling in unity with one another because of Christ living in us by the power of His Holy Spirit.

And that's what basically Paul is saying that Jesus brought this about. Let's wrap this up. Someone read for me Galatians 5, 6. So with the importance now being faith in Christ, physical circumcision has lost its value.

Notice I said physical circumcision has lost its value. Someone read that for me. Galatians 5, 6. See? So whether you're physically circumcised as a Jew, or whether you're not circumcised as a Gentile, that doesn't mean anything.

You know what matters? You live by faith, loving other people. That's what counts in the eyes of God. Now, I said physical circumcision doesn't matter.

But spiritual circumcision still does. What is spiritual circumcision? Circumcision of the heart. That when God by the Holy Spirit cuts away the old nature, the things that we inherited from Adam, the sinful tendencies, that still needs to be cut away.

But that's not cut away physically. That's done by the work of Christ, the Holy Spirit of God, striking dead the old man and bringing out this new man born of His Spirit. Able to live and follow the Lord Jesus Christ and please God the Father.

So, let's wrap this up. Let's look at the last couple of verses of this chapter. Someone read for me Ephesians 2, verses 15 and 16.

That's right. And then, let's read verse 17 as well. Ephesians 2, 17.

And one more. So, His purpose, we just talked about, to create this one new man, neither Jew nor Gentile, a spiritual man, born of His Spirit, by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ. And He came and preached peace to you who are far off, Gentile, and to those who are near.

Now, when... I had to think about that. What did Jesus say? How did He preach peace to the Gentile? Because remember like the Syrophenician woman who had the daughter that was demon possessed, you know, she begged Jesus to do something for her daughter and He said, look, it's not right to give the children's bread to the dogs. And boy, but she wasn't offended by that.

She said, she said, well, Master, even the dogs long to eat the crumbs that fall from the children's table. Jesus turned to her and said, woman, you have great faith. And He healed her daughter.

She wasn't a Jew. And there was a centurion's servant, not a Jew. Jesus healed.

There was, there's glimpses. But what did, what in Scripture, what do we have in Scripture that indicates that He brought peace to the Gentiles? Because we know He said many times, I was only sent for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But He gave hints that there was another purpose.

Speaking of sheep, remember when He talked about His sheep? What did He say about sheep that was a hint that He was thinking about us, the Gentiles? Ah, that's right. I have other sheep that are not of this fold, but someday, the two folds are going to be one. There's a hint.

They didn't understand it at the time. I don't think they had the Holy Spirit. They couldn't have handled it.

You're going to make us one with the Gentiles? No. They couldn't have handled it until they received the Holy Spirit. Alright, that's one.

That's a good instance. Thank you, Sam. What else? How about the end of His life? You know, when He commissioned His... Because He couldn't go to the whole world Himself.

He had to send His disciples. And so He instructed them. And what did He say that indicates that His intention was to preach peace to the whole world? That's right.

Go ye therefore into all the world, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all things whatsoever that I have commanded you. And then one of our favorite Scriptures. It's probably the one that nearly all of us have memorized whether we've tried to or not.

John 3, 16. Let me tell you what it does not say. For God so loved the Jew that He gave His only begotten Son.

It was a major hint there. For God so loved the world. We were in His heart.

He had a purpose, a specific purpose for the Jewish people and the law and commandments He gave to them. It was put into effect for a time. And you know what the law is kind of like? Paul described the law as? It's like a guardian.

We were entrusted to the law because the law contains such dynamic principles of order and righteousness and justice that it's safe. We're safe. If you do these things, it will go well with you.

That was God's heart. It was a tutor. Like until we grew up to understand who our Father is, we were entrusted to the law.

It was like our schoolmaster, our instructor. But the goal for all the time was for us to come to the understanding of our Father is good. His heart is pure and His wisdom is perfect.

And when we come to that place of faith, when we say God is our Father, Paul says we cry out, Abba, Abba Father. And at that time we receive His very Spirit and we become His sons and daughters. Amen.

And the purpose of the law is over. It's done. It's still good.

But it's great for children. I encourage all of you, teach the laws of God to your children and grandchildren. They contain the rudimentary principles that are infused in creation for order and justice and righteousness and goodness.

But our relationship with the Father is through Christ and through the Holy Spirit. We are people of the new covenant so that in Christ there's neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free. Everyone is one in Christ.

One new man. Got it?

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