

THE PRINCE OF PEACE

by Ray C. Stedman

In Ephesians 2, we come now to a section in which the Apostle Paul deals with Christ's role as the great peacemaker among men. Here we will see him in fulfillment of that prophecy in Isaiah 9:

**... his name shall be called
"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." {Isa 9:6b RSV}**

This title belongs strictly to Jesus.

To some, it may seem that Dr. Kissinger is the prince of peace these days. We are all living in expectation that peace is about to come in Vietnam. Perhaps by Christmas we'll be able to celebrate the end of America's longest war. Have you wondered why it has taken so long to settle this conflict? Many great minds have devoted themselves to trying to end this war, but they have been baffled by it. I remember reading several years ago a statement by Secretary General U Thant of the United Nations, in which he cried out in bafflement and bewilderment as to why the secret of peace in Vietnam seems to elude men. The answer, of course, as expressed by Paul in Romans 3, is that "The way of peace they have not known," {Rom 3:17 KJV}.

Men don't understand what brings conflict and, therefore, what brings peace. We can see this at the individual level, within the family circle, in a church, in a company, in a state, in a nation, and among the nations of the world. It is always the same problem -- men do not know the way of peace.

In this very remarkable passage, the apostle gives us the way of peace. He uses as an illustration the fact that Jesus Christ bridged the widest chasm which ever has existed between men -- the gulf between the Jew and the Gentile. If you don't think that conflict can claim title to being the most difficult gulf to bridge, I suggest you consider why it is it has been so difficult to settle the Arab-Israeli problem in the Middle East. The greatest minds of our day have tried to work that out, and no one has gotten anywhere near a settlement. It is because this conflict is extremely difficult to bridge. Paul describes how Christ actually does it. And this is a wonderful picture for us of how peace can be brought in any area of conflict or hostility, whether among individuals or groups or nations. Paul says,

But now in Christ Jesus you [Gentiles] who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. {Eph 2:13-18 RSV}

There are three mentions of the word "peace" in that passage:

- "He is our peace," Paul says, speaking of Christ, and
- He has made peace (Verse 15: "so making peace"), and,
- "... he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near."

In those three occurrences of the word *peace*, you have the apostle's outline of how Christ makes peace, the way he goes about it. So it is very important that we note these.

1. He is our peace -- that is the origin of peace.

2. Then there is the process of peace, how it is actually brought about -- he came and made peace.
3. Finally there is the means of laying hold or possessing that peace -- he preached peace.

I want to underscore for you the fact that this is not mere doctrine, not mere theology. If you are having a conflict with anybody -- whether it is in your home, at your work, in your neighborhood, in the church, or in the world, this is the way of peace. This is the secret of peace. This is the key to peace.

First, the origin of peace: "He is our peace, who has made us both one." Paul starts with a definition of what true peace really is. True peace is oneness. It is not merely the cessation of hostility, the absence of conflict; it means being one. This is very important to know. Otherwise, when you talk about peace, you are only being superficial.

- Is it "peace" when you get two armies to lay down their weapons and stop fighting each other? Well, we call it that. And certainly it is to be preferred over armed conflict. But it is not really peace -- not according to God's definition.
- Is it peace when a husband and wife agree not to get a divorce but to stay together, perhaps for the sake of the children, but that home continues in coldness and divisiveness, with no harmony or joy? Well, it may be peace according to man's definition, but it isn't according to God's.
- Is it peace when two friends who haven't spoken to each other for some time finally decide to agree to disagree, to speak civilly to each other, but they don't seek each other's company any more? Not according to God's definition.
- When a church maintains its rituals and programs, and yet is filled with division and strife and coldness and festering resentment, is that a peaceful church? No, not according to this definition.

You see, peace is oneness, harmony. It is sharing mutual enjoyment. It is being one. Anything else is superficial and temporary and highly unsatisfactory.

You know this to be true, don't you? You have made peace on superficial terms, and have found it only external. If you merely agree not to fight, it is not peace. And invariably it results, sooner or later, in a new outbreak, with all the previous animosity surging to the surface once again. It is only temporary, and never very satisfying. This is why what we call peace among nations never lasts -- because it isn't really peace. It isn't oneness at all. It is only a weariness with warfare, and agreement to stop it for awhile until we can all recuperate and rearm. Then it breaks out all over again, because nothing is ever settled. God isn't interested in that.

But here the apostle tells us the secret of peace. The secret of oneness is a Person: "He is our peace." And when Christ Jesus makes peace -- between individuals or between nations -- that peace will be a satisfying, permanent, and genuine peace. It will be a real peace that will last and last. And it will be a totally satisfying experience. What Paul is saying is that in order to live at peace, you must have peace. The problem with most of us is that we want to start by clearing up only the results of conflict. God never starts there; he starts with the person. He says peace is a Person, and in order for you to live at peace with someone else, you must be at peace with the Person of Christ. If you have his peace, then you can start solving the conflict around you. But you never can do it on any other basis. So the place to start, the origin of peace, is the settling of any problems between you and Jesus Christ. That is always the place to start.

Many people come to me, as to any pastor, with various problems involving conflict. Usually they are upset, troubled, discouraged, angry. They report to me at great length all the terrible things the other person has done, and all the reasons why they are justified in being so angry, and feeling so mistreated. I listen to it all, and then I have to say to them, "Yes, you've got a problem. But that isn't your only problem. You really have two problems. And the one you haven't mentioned at all is the one you must start with." Then I have to point out to them that their basic problem is that they don't have any peace themselves. They are not at peace. They are upset, angry, emotionally distraught. And everything they do and think is colored by that emotional state. They

can't see anything straight, they don't see things in balance, their perspective is distorted, everything is out of focus. And it is impossible to solve the problem -- impossible -- until they themselves acquire peace.

But this is the promise of God to Christians: He is our peace. And once their attitude is changed, once their heart is settled, once they have put the matter into the hands of the Lord, and they see that he is active in it, that he has a solution, and their own heart is therefore at peace, then they can begin to understand what is happening and can apply some intelligent remedies to the situation which will work out the problem. There is profound psychological insight in the fact that the apostle begins with the declaration that Christ is our peace. He alone can accomplish it -- making us one.

Now look at the process of peace. How does it happen? It comes in three stages, Paul says. Three things must happen before you really have oneness. But this is what Christ can do, and this is the way he does it:

1. First, he "has broken down the dividing wall of hostility." The hostility must end first. "... by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, ..." That is how he breaks down the wall, as we will see in a moment.
2. And, second, "that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,"
3. And, third, "might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end."

I remind you that Paul is talking about the ending of the great conflict between the Jews and the Gentiles of his day. He says the first thing Jesus did was to break down the "middle wall of partition," the "dividing wall of hostility." Paul is referring to a feature of the temple in Jerusalem. He was a Jew, and had been brought up there. He understood the temple -- he had been there many times. And he remembered the wall, about 3 or 4 feet high, which ran through the court of the temple, dividing it into two sections, separating the court of the Gentiles, where the Gentiles were permitted to come, from the inner court, into which only Jews were permitted. There was a sign which warned anyone who wasn't a Jew that if they dared to venture into this inner court, they did so on pain of death.

In fact, in the year 1871, archaeologists, digging around the temple site in Jerusalem, actually uncovered the very stone marked with this warning. These were the actual words, translated from both the Hebrew and the Greek: "No man of another race is to proceed within the partition and enclosing wall about the sanctuary. Any one arrested there will have himself to blame for the penalty of death which will be imposed as a consequence."

Now, the wall is a symbol. Actually it was not destroyed until A. D. 70, several years after this letter was written, when the temple itself was destroyed. But Paul says the hostility it represented was demolished in Jesus Christ. At best, the Jews treated the Gentiles with aloofness; at worst, they despised and hated them. There was enormous hostility between these two peoples.

Several years ago I walked along the infamous Berlin Wall. As I walked, I saw the East German guards stationed at intervals. And I could feel all the built-in suspicion and mutual distrust, the hatred and hostility, and the outright defiance represented by that wall. Many people have been killed trying to escape from East Germany. And where their bodies fell, the West Germans have erected crosses upon which they place wreaths as a reminder -- in open defiance of the East German guards. You can't enter the neighborhood of that wall without feeling the intense suspicion and hostility it represents.

There are walls like that among us. There are walls in homes like that. There is hostility and hatred and defiance and suspicion and distrust between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between neighbors and friends. These walls of hostility arise. They are what most of us run up against. We feel the hostility, the anger, the deep-seated resentment and bitterness, and we say, "It's no use; there's nothing we can do."

But the apostle says that Jesus Christ knows how to remove these walls. How? Well, Paul tells us: "... by

abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances." That is the way. It is the law which makes the hostility, and if you remove the law, you'll end the hostility.

Once again, we are dealing here with a very profound psychological insight. The strength of any hostility is demand. This is what the apostle is saying. What creates hostility? Why, a self-righteous demand upon someone, a demand without any admission of guilt on the part of the one demanding, a one-sided justice, a holier-than-thou insistence. This is what creates hostility. The Jews despised the Gentiles because they considered themselves better than Gentiles. "We have the Law of Moses," they said. "The Law is right and true; it reflects the character of God. You Gentiles don't have the Law." And in their blindness and self-righteous hypocrisy, they thought they were keeping this Law because they didn't do some of the outward, external acts the Law prohibited. And so they hated and despised the Gentiles because they thought they were superior. The Gentiles, on the other hand, hated the Jews, because they knew they lived in self-righteous hypocrisy. So there was intense hostility between them.

Jesus' solution is to take away the Law. Remove that from the picture -- help them to see that the Law judges both alike -- and you'll end the hostility. Put them on the same level -- so they both need grace, both need forgiveness -- and you remove hostility.

This is so beautifully exemplified in a story in the eighth chapter of John's gospel. Jesus is confronted with a woman taken in adultery. She is dragged before him by a crowd of self-righteous Pharisees who say she has been taken in the very act. (They never mention the man who must have been involved. He gets away.) And the Law, they say, condemns her, says she must die, because she is guilty. And what does Jesus do? He can't deny the Law. He simply stoops down and begins to write on the ground. No one knows what he wrote. I've thought that perhaps he wrote what the finger of God wrote on the wall of the palace in Babylon, when Belshazzar had his feast: "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin (You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting)," {Dan 5:25 KJV}. Whatever he wrote, those who watched him became convicted of their own guilt, and, beginning with the eldest, John says, they began to find excuses to get away. One remembered he had an appointment; one heard his wife calling; and so they began to disappear. Finally only the woman and Jesus were left there together.

Now, what had he done? Well, he had simply applied the Law to the judges as well as to the judged, that's all. He'd brought them under the same Law. He'd taken the judges and the judged, had put them into the same bag and shaken them up together, as a woman would with pieces of meat before cooking, and they had come out covered with the flour of the same guilt. When he did this, there was no accusation left.

And this is what Paul says Jesus has done with the Law. He fulfilled the Law in himself, and by doing so, he rendered both Jew and Gentile unacceptable before God. He showed them how the Law was meant to be fulfilled. And when they saw his impeccable life, the Jews knew they were just as guilty as the Gentiles. This is what Paul argues at great length in Romans 2, 3, and 4 -- that the Jew has no advantage over the Gentile at all simply because he knows more truth, but that he stands on exactly the same ground -- Jew and Gentile need to be forgiven. And so our Lord gave them a common ground of forgiveness. And when he did that, there was no hostility left.

So this is the way to start ending hostility: Stop being self-righteous. Remove the self-righteousness, the demand that one change without any admission of a need for change on the part of the other. This removes hostility. But as long as one insists that the other is all wrong, and there is nothing at all he needs to change, then of course hostility and resentment remain. I've seen this work with parents and children. As long as parents insist they never make mistakes, never do anything wrong, never need to apologize, never say "I'm sorry" to their children, those children invariably grow up resenting and hating their parents. Because self-righteousness always creates hostility. It is only when parents see themselves as able to be wrong, needing forgiveness themselves, needing to be understood and set free by the forgiveness of their children, as well as granting forgiveness to them, that there can be harmony. I've seen the same principle work between friends, and among church leaders, and other Christians. Hostility comes by self-righteous demand. Remove that demand, and the hostility ends.

Then what? Is that all? Is God content merely with ending hostility? Never. There is a second step, "...that he

might create in himself one new man." Notice the word "create." That is what only God can do. Man cannot create.

We say of somebody, "He's creative." What do we mean? We mean he is able to take things which are already there and put them together in a new way, thus bringing about something perhaps somewhat different. He's rearranged the material, and we call that creativity, but, in the ultimate sense of the word, only God is creative. Men may be ingenious, but they're not creative. Only God can take a situation which is nothing, and make out of it something. God creates out of nothing. He makes a new man, a new unity which never existed before.

Many people have experienced this. People often say to me, "You know, since I stopped trying to judge my husband (or my wife), and we've come together acknowledging that we both need God, both need forgiveness, I've discovered that we have a whole new relationship I never dreamed was possible. It is better than anything we had before. Something new has begun, a greater unity than ever has developed." Sometimes people come to me and say, "Our marriage is dead. Our love is gone. There's no way we can restore it. We might as well end the marriage." It is such a joy then to be able to point out to them that in Christ a new relationship comes into being, something which never was there before. And many have laid hold of this and found it indeed to be true that in the new unity, the new man which grows out of the relationship brought to Christ, there is a freedom and a glory and a beauty and a richness which was never there before, and it is better than it ever was.

Here in Ephesians, of course, the new man Paul refers to is the church itself. The church is a picture of what Jesus Christ does. In the church, there is neither Jew nor Gentile. The Jew does not have to become a Gentile; the Gentile does not have to become a Jew. There is a new man, a new person created. And the same is true of any other division among men. Blacks don't have to become whites, and whites don't have to become blacks in the church. Both can bring their own distinctive cultural heritage to the church, and they don't have to give it up. In that sense, the church is never to integrate; it is to make a new man. They both bring what they are, and they discover that there is a oneness, a fellowship, a union, a beautiful relationship which ultimately has nothing to do with cultural heritage. There is a sense of belonging to one another, and a joy in that relationship. The same is true of the poor and the rich. The poor don't have to live like the rich; the rich don't have to live like the poor. There can be different standards of living within the church, but there is a oneness and a joy and an acceptance of one another. The same is true between male and female. Males don't have to be female; females don't have to act like males, Women's Lib notwithstanding. In the church there is oneness. A new unity is formed, which cannot be discovered apart from the settling of hostility on the ground of the peace that Jesus Christ gives.

There is still a third step: "...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross." In other words, ultimate peace must be with God. A man or a woman, parents or children, husband or wife -- wherever the conflict may have been -- once the hostility has been ended by the removal of a self-righteous spirit and they have begun to experience this new unity in Christ, must see themselves as being forgiven and accepted by God. Otherwise, self-righteousness will begin to arise again, sooner or later. If there is any area in which one feels superior to the other, in which one says, "I didn't need quite as much forgiveness as that one did; my level of life was higher," then self-righteousness starts in again. But if they stand before God on the same level, on the same ground exactly, both needing the same forgiveness, then the hostility is brought to an end. This is what the apostle says, "...thereby bringing the hostility to an end." A complete and total end.

A few months ago I was in another city, and a young man came up to me and said, "I want to tell you about my marriage. I haven't been married very long. After we were married I discovered that my wife was not a virgin before we were married, though I was. I had a tremendous struggle with this. I forgave her; I understood the situation, understood that she needed to be forgiven. But emotionally I continued to wrestle. Then I began to see that my behavior had been no better than hers, before God. Though she violated the external precepts of sexual morality, I had violated them also, internally, in my thoughts and attitudes. And, before God, there was no difference. I began to see that I was just as much in need of forgiveness for my failures as she was. When I saw that, then there was healing."

This is what Paul is saying. We are to see each other as no different whatsoever, before God. If in one area of our life we think we don't need to be forgiven -- in that area we are utterly unacceptable to God. If there is an

area where we think we have never done wrong, in that area we are totally unacceptable to God. The only ground we have to stand on before him is that of forgiveness, and "not of works, lest any man should boast," {Eph 2:9 KJV}. Therefore, everyone stands before God on the same level. When people see this, hostility is brought to an end. Nobody is pointing a finger, nobody is blaming the other, nobody is saying, "Well, if only you'd done this, then I could have done that." All such division and schism and hostility is brought to an end, and there is only the reception of the grace and the forgiveness of God. Hearts are healed, and hostility ends.

This is what is brought out in the last section -- the means of possessing peace. How do you do this? How do you actually lay hold of it? Well, the apostle says,

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. {Eph 2:17-18 RSV}

Two steps are necessary actually to lay hold of this kind of peace:

1. The first is believing the message God has given you. "He came and preached peace," says Paul to these Ephesians. That is, "Jesus preached to you." How did he do it? He didn't come in person; he came in the person of Paul. Paul was sent by the Lord. That is what the word "apostle" means. Paul says in Second Corinthians, "We beseech you on behalf of Christ [in the place of Christ], be reconciled to God," {2 Cor 5:20b RSV}. Paul's preaching was Jesus' preaching of peace. Christ seized the initiative and sent the apostle to proclaim the fact which God has already brought into being. All that remains is to believe it. When you believe that the ground of self-righteousness has been removed, that you have no more standing before God, because of what you think has been proper behavior, than somebody who has failed openly and blatantly, then you have begun to believe what God has said. You have begun to believe the preaching of peace. Preaching is never an argument, never a debate or dialogue. Preaching is simply the announcement of a fact. You can either accept it or reject it, but you can't quarrel with it. It is what God says is true. And this is what God says is true -- that the ground of self-righteousness has been removed, and a new relationship is possible. A new relationship will come into being which will be better and more beautiful, richer than anything you've known before. And God says he is satisfied with the arrangement, that he accepts you both on those terms.
2. Then what? Well, the last step is beautiful. It is communication with the Father: "... through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father." You can come before him, upheld by the mystery of the entire Trinity at work on your behalf. This is probably the greatest statement in the book of Ephesians. I don't know a higher plateau of truth than this: "Through him [the Son] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father." There is the Trinity of God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- all working together to bring us into the closest possible relationship with God: the understanding and the daily experience of his Fatherhood, his Fatherly care over us. So we begin to understand that the circumstances of our life are chosen by the Father, that the trials and pressures and joys and sorrows all have been selected by a loving Father. We begin to see that his provision of power and truth and life is all available in Jesus Christ, and we understand that we can appeal to him. We can cry out to him. He invites us to communicate with him, to unload before him all the burdens and pressures of our life. And we begin to live in this relationship with the Father.

There is nothing higher than this. When the full glory of this relationship breaks upon us, we will have discovered that nothing can be greater. "This is eternal life," Jesus said, "that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent," {John 17:3 RSV}.

This is when life begins to be what God intended it to be. So this is where God brings us. We've been climbing with Paul, step by step, up a great mountain. And now we have come to the very summit: "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

We can go no higher. Life with the Father is the most delightful of all experiences, for all that we need is provided by a Father's heart, and a Father's love.

This is the way God deals with us and our hostility. What separates us from each other is our insistence that they are wrong and we are right, that there is never any reason for an admission of guilt on our part. But as soon as we admit that we are wrong in the very areas where we think we are right, and that there is no way of justifying ourselves before God in any area of our lives, other than being forgiven, then the hostility ends, and God brings us into that glorious relationship of freedom and enjoyment of life with the Father.

Prayer

Our holy Father, we thank you for the access we have to you, our loving heavenly Father, One who accepts us, who forgives us, who enjoys us, who glories in us, who is tenderly concerned about the most intimate details of our needs. And, Father, how foolish we've been, oftentimes, to stand in self-righteous judgment against others, to insist that we had areas of life in which we were clear before you, that we didn't need to be forgiven, that only "they" needed it. Father, forgive us for that. How like that unrighteous steward we have often been, when we have been forgiven so much, but have been unwilling to extend forgiveness to another. Awaken us, Lord, to the great debt we have before you. Help us to believe the message of peace which has been preached, to understand the announcement of the Holy Spirit to our hearts, and thus to enter into the joy of life with you. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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