Ephesians 2:14-16

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 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, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity

# Dispensationalism & the 3 People Groups of the Bible

*What is dispensationalism?*

Paul is transitioning from the last verse where the idea of the gentiles being far off has been done away with. This is an important doctrine that is rooted in key Old Testament covenant with Abraham [Genesis 12:3] and later with Israel through Moses in Deuteronomy 28-29. In this covenant God said that in taking on the oath of the covenant they would be His people [29:10-13]. This brought the Jews near, but as a side effect, kept most gentiles distant. It is worth noting that the Law kept the Jews separate (it was part of their oath that they would follow the Law), but it provided for evangelism and for gentiles to become part of Israel to be called God’s people [Exodus 12:49].

With this key doctrine focusing on God’s people being the Jews the Old Testament takes a very strong turn from recording on gentiles like Adam or Noah and shifts to looking at the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as they become the nation of Israel who will be the ones to take on that covenant through Moses’ stewardship. The separation between the Jews and gentiles continues even to this day as devout Jews attempt to fulfill as much of the Law as they can without a temple. God shut the temple down, but they have spiritualized much of the commandments in an attempt to make compliance possible.

*Who are the 3 people groups of the Bible?*

The early days of the church showed that many of the Christians were still showing up at the temple or synagogues (Acts 2:46, 3:1, 4:1, 5:20, 5:42). It was not until Paul’s ministry to the gentiles began in Acts 9:15 and Acts 10 & 11 that there seems to be a clear understanding within the church that the gentiles were in any way involved with the church. Paul, knowing that the Ephesian church had quite a few Jewish believers who were probably still not sure what do with this idea, calls out specifically the Christ-focused approach God took to this problem of division that once existed. The two people groups became a third people group [the church] once they believed.

# He is Our Peace Who Made Both Groups into One

*What is the overall theme of the book of Ephesians?*

Paul’s focus on who Christ is in relationship to the church is part of the theme of this letter to the Ephesians: Christ is our identification and we’re being conformed to His image. This is linked to the amazing blessings we have in chapter one, the tremendous perspective of being in God’s plan in chapter two, the eternal family of love in chapter three, the unity and growth in chapter four, the relationship as His bride in chapter 5, and the military unit and armor we have in chapter six. So in this particular passage we see that Christ is the bringer of the peace between the two historically separate people groups.

## Race in Christianity

*How does the New Testament deal with race?*

It is worth looking at race within Paul’s writings. He is not interested in promoting earthly thinking about race because of several key doctrines:

1. He knows that upon salvation our citizenship is in heaven [Philippians 3:20]
2. He knows that upon salvation we are made a new creation in Christ [Galatians 6:15]
3. He is not willing to promote segregation based on race [Galatians 2:11-12]
4. He, as a pious Jew who would not have willingly violated the Law, has reached out to the gentiles ignoring race at God’s specific direction [Acts 9, Galatians 2:9]

When we look at race within the church the dispensational distinctions for theological identification may be relevant at times, but within the church the issues of race are done away with [c.f. Colossians 3:11].

## Broke Down the Barrier of the Dividing Wall

*What was the barrier?*

The Law was given as a barrier between Israel and the nations that were not following God around them. The Law was its very self a dividing wall. It made practices of living so difficult to ‘blend’ with the pagan rituals that it could have kept the nations separate.

The liberty we appreciate in Christ stands in stark contrast to the earthly thinking of liberalism or legalism. Rome and kingdoms before it attempted things that were rooted in this sort of earthly thinking in an attempt to use legislation to force conformity and expected religious liberalism to coalesce into a warm mush of religious goo. The Jewish zealots like the Pharisees were unlikely to compromise on these key doctrines of the Law.

It took Christ to demolish parts of the temple process on the cross to break down the barrier of the wall.

# By Abolishing in His Flesh the Enmity

The Law represented God’s righteous and wrathful attitude towards wickedness in Israel and that which separated them from God’s people. The gentiles were not under the Law, not having agreed to the covenant, but as Paul writes in Romans 1 they suppress their knowledge of God and His righteousness.

*What did God do on the cross that abolished this enmity?*

Christ, being 100% God and 100% man [the hypostatic union], was able to go onto the cross as a representative before God as Adam’s line, but be untainted by sin as God’s line. The hypostatic union created a condition that would allow God to pour His wrath on His Son and satisfy His demand for the consequences of Sin that separated man from God. This first barrier was not what Paul was referring to!

The second barrier – which Paul is concerned with here – is the barrier of two people groups. Our identification with Christ and unity in Him at the point of faith in Him demolished the separating wall between Israel and the gentiles.

## Which is the Law of Commandments Contained in Ordinances

*What is a commandment verses an ordinance?*

The idea here of a commandment is simple to us. We think of the 10 commandments and the 613 requirements of the law, but the word ordinance here is the Greek word dogma, it means doctrine. So the commandments are explicit, but the doctrines or ordinances were the compiled and culturally appropriated teachings of the Jewish leadership. This is problematic as Paul points out elsewhere [as does Christ in His earthly ministry] because the leadership took the doctrines and misappropriated them.

The Law demanded separation, created a sense of entitlement for the Jews, and by its system defied occupation while the temple existed. As recorded in the gospels the temple curtain which created a holy place for God’s presence to dwell was torn in two [Matthew 27:51] and in AD 70 Rome destroyed the temple in a way that made compliance with the Law impossible. Obedience to the Law now is not only undoable, but it is something God tore away from Israel through Christ so that they would be confronted by who Jesus Christ was and is and is to come!

The Law’s observance of technological norms also made it an interesting temporary system. As newer technology was developed Jews trying to observe the Law were forced to either ignore the technology, reject the technology, or create hypothetical applications of the Law for the technology. A rabbi recently declared that cloned pork meat was kosher because it was not from the actual animal. This is not covered in the Law at all!

## So That in Himself He Might Make the Two into One New Man

*If we are one man now with all who believe how should we be treating each other?*

The world around us wants us to be ‘one family’ through a common ancestry in evolution or reincarnation or agnosticism. What God has done is to make us one in Christ. This unity changes our citizenship, our perspective, and our eternal blessings in Christ. It allows Paul to write in chapter 4 that we should be one and to be tolerating each one not in pandering to the flesh, but in observance of the love of Christ.

## Thus Establishing Peace

It is important to observe that this peace is dependent completely on faith. Not on works. Not on race. Not on age. It is based completely on faith. Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your savior? Me, too! Let’s fellowship together in God’s peace.

*Why does it matter that God established this peace?*

God established this peace so it is worth calling out that we should not go about trying to disturb it through legalism or liberalism. We should walk in it by the Holy Spirit.

## And Might Reconcile Them Both in one Body to God through the Cross

*What does reconcile mean here in this context?*

Reconciliation is a key word here showing that God made the two one before His eyes into one body through death on the cross! If the reconciliation was just a compatibility between two types that would be a different expectation. If the reconciliation was into one new set of super-doctrines that would be a different outcome. Instead the reconciliation is into one new body to God! A replacement of the old group (Israel) to God.

This was accomplished through the cross, which is important not only because it is central to history, but because it once again demonstrates the critical nature of substitution to accomplish this spiritual feat.

## By it Having Put to Death the Enmity

*How can enmity be dealt with?*

The Jews who were persecuting Christ and calling for His death on the cross unintentionally did away with their own entire system and helped create the church. Now those are unintentional consequences! They thought that the Law gave them favor before God, but because they had abandoned careful adherence to its practices and had created two different court systems to promote legalism; they were under Rome’s rule because they had disobeyed it; and they were practicing its tenets out of selfishness and not relationship, so it became a curse to them.

This curse put them at enmity with God, enmity with the gentiles, and clearly by the split into legalists and liberalists they were even at enmity with one another. Christ cured that angry division through His sacrifice. He did this in fulfillment of the Law and the prophets. Christ was the convergence of Eve’s line (Genesis 3:15), Abraham’s line (Genesis 12), David’s line (2 Samuel 7), God’s line (Matthew 1:18), obedience to the Law (Deuteronomy 28-29), and could therefore be representative of each part of that enmity. His unifying work of death on the cross has results on into eternity for us and all of those who were formerly descendants of Adam.

# Conclusion

No matter where sin fell in history Christ paid for it so that all who believed could be saved and God’s righteousness satisfied. No matter what our earthly heritage we can walk away from the division that it may cause superficially and embrace one another in Christ. When we see differences in earthly attributes our tendency in the flesh is tribalism or indiscriminate inclusion. What we find in Christ is an entirely different description of what we need and should be thinking about.