

Sermon 9: Biblical Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Ephesians 2:11-18

Text: Ephesians 2:11-18 "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father..."

Introduction:

- **Three questions:**
 - Should we forgive people who have wronged us?
 - Should we let go of bitterness?
 - Why or why not?
- **Two approaches to this question:**
 - **Therapeutic model:** Yes, with some nuance between forgiveness and reconciliation for the following reasons.
 - Holding on to bitterness stimulates stress hormones that are physically detrimental to our bodies.
 - This stress on our bodies can damage our cardiovascular and immune systems.
 - Constantly reliving painful circumstances can increase our risk of anxiety and depression.
 - Ruminating over things we cannot control, or resolve will divert our energy away from personal growth and productivity.
 - **A simple assessment of this model:**
 - These are good practical reasons to forgive and let go of bitterness.
 - You do not need to be a Christian or embrace Biblical values to realize that unforgiveness and bitterness hurt you more than those who have wronged you.
 - This model has two glaring shortcomings:
 - There is no real justice in this model.

- The wrong is overlooked for the sake of my own wellbeing, but never really addressed.
- **Biblical Model: Forgive as God has forgiven you:**
 - This text gives us an alternative solution, that does not compromise justice.
 - It also gives us a real and compelling basis for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Summary: We were once hopeless until God mercifully bridged the gap through Christ's work.

Proposition: He wants us to live as if we have been reconciled to Him.

Interrogative: How can we do this?

Part 1: We were born in need of reconciliation: 2:11-12 "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world..."

- **Paul's audience was formerly in a desperate condition:**
 - **Physically separate from God's people: 2:11** "In time past Gentiles in the flesh..."
 - **Viewed with disdain: 2:11** "Called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision..."
 - **Outside the covenant blessing and promises:**
 - **2:12** "Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel..."
 - **2:12** "Strangers from the covenants of promise..."
 - **Unable to reverse that condition: 2:12** "Having no hope, and without God in the world..."

Part 2: We are now reconciled to God: 2:13 "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ..."

- **The heart of the passage:**
 - **God's grace made all the difference:** "But now..."
 - **We are now united to Christ:** "In Christ Jesus..."
 - **That union is made possible by the shedding of Christ's blood:** "Made nigh by the blood of Christ..."

Part 3: This reconciliation came at a high price: 2:13-16 "By the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might

reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby..."

- **What He did:**

- **First: He united two Peoples: 2:14-16** "He hath made both one...one new man...one body..."
 - Gentiles were distrusted as foreign occupiers who undermined Jewish culture and religious practices.
 - Their social customs, religious beliefs, and dietary practices were radically different.
 - Their calendars and weekly practices were very different.
 - They had a very painful history of tension.
- **Second: He addressed the offense between them: 2:14-15** "Hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us...abolished the enmity..."
 - Probably a reference to the wall built by Herod the Great as a reaction against one of the most infamous days in ancient Jewish history, when the Greeks out of deep contempt for Jewish religious practices broke into the temple and desecrated it during the Maccabean Revolt.
 - Ephesians was a prison epistle written from Rome to the church at Ephesus.
 - Ironically, the catalyst for Paul's imprisonment was the accusation in **Acts 21:27-30** that he had brought an Ephesian Gentile into the temple which was not permitted by the temple guards.
- **Three: He addressed our greatest problem:**
 - **He personally removed the offense: 2:14** "He is our peace..."
 - **He satisfied the law's demands for full justice: 2:15** "Abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances..."
 - **He did it in a way that applies to everyone: 2:15-16** "So making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God..."

- **How He did it:**

- **His blood washed away our sin: 2:13** "By the blood of Christ..."
 - **Colossians 1:14** "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins..."
 - **Hebrews 9:22-28** "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission...now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself...So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many..."

- **His body bore our guilt and the punishment we deserved: 2:15** "In his flesh..."
 - **1 Peter 2:24** "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree..."
 - **2 Corinthians 5:21** "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him..."
- **His cross demonstrated that He became a curse for us: 2:16** "By the cross..."
 - **Philippians 2:8** "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross..."
 - **Hebrews 12:2** "Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame..."
 - **Galatians 3:13** "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree..."

Part 4: This reconciliation is multifaceted: 2:17-18 "And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father..."

- **Three Statements:**
 - **It was preached to Gentiles: 2:17** "Preached peace to you which were afar off..."
 - **It was also preached to the Jews: 2:17** "And to them that were nigh..."
 - **It united people to God and to one another: 2:18** "Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father..."
- **Implications:**
 - The gospel is good news of reconciliation in two senses.
 - It addresses the need for vertical reconciliation.
 - It also addresses the need for reconciliation.
- **The basis and motivation for reconciliation are the cross:**
 - **God is the ultimate example:**
 - **Matthew 5:44-48** "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust...Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect..."

- **Romans 5:10** "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son..."
- **We are called to be like our Father:**
 - **Matthew 5:9** "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God..."
 - **Colossians 3:12-15** "Put on therefore, as the elect of God...bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye...And let the peace of God rule in your hearts..."

Application:

- **To the non-Christian:**
 - God loves you even as you live in rebellion to Him.
 - He is pursuing you and has done everything necessary to address the sin that separates you from Him.
 - Will you humble yourself and be reconciled to Him?
- **To the believer:**
 - **Worship and praise to God: Revelation 5:9-10** "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth..."
 - **Peace in our restless souls:**
 - **Romans 8:1** "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus..."
 - **Romans 8:15-18** "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us..."
 - **Romans 5:1-2** "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God..."
 - **Ephesians 6:14-15** "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace..."
 - **Interpersonal forbearance:**
 - **Colossians 3:12-15** "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness,

humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye...And let the peace of God rule in your hearts..."

- **Forgive as God has forgiven you:** This text gives us an alternative solution, that does not compromise justice and gives us a real and compelling basis for forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Let's live as if we have been reconciled to God.