

Ephesians 2:13-22

August 3, 2006 – 9th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST ~ *Orthodoxy Sunday*

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Come Near to God

✠ **Through the blood of Christ (vv.13-18)**

✠ **As members of God's household (vv.19-22)**

In the name of Jesus, our peace, dear reconciled children of God:

Can you imagine the reaction if you called up any of the local news media outlets and informed the receptionist, "I have the perfect solution for peace in the Middle East"? "You're kidding, right?" "No! I mean it. This will work again because it works every time." – long pause...[Click.].

That conversation was over before it began because practically everybody including Christians especially in America are convinced that all religions are the same and "Orthodoxy" is a bad word for religious fanatics and fruitcakes. It's right up there with bran muffins and a flat earth.

But if you know what these words from the Lord's Apostle Paul mean for you and for all people, you can be confident not only of the perfect solution for peace in the Middle East but all the way from earth to heaven. Let's get personal first. Here's the heart of the message: **Come Near to God.**

✠ **Through the blood of Christ (vv.13-18)**

No human being would come up with this Way to God's heart. In fact, ancient hostilities dictated that nobody would want to. The city of Ephesus, where the recipients of this letter lived, was one of the thriving commercial centers of the Roman Empire. It had a well protected port in a prime spot to catch east-west traffic between Rome and the eastern provinces by land and by sea. Farthest from the minds of Ephesian citizens was making peace with the Jews in that troublesome province of Judea. Greeks had their own pantheon of gods. Why would they need the LORD who claimed to be above all gods? Greek worship was X-rated. Why accept a religion marrying one man with one woman for life?

And the feeling was mutual. The ancient Jews were God's chosen people and they knew it. Non-Jews they called, "Greeks" or "Gentiles," or sometimes just "dogs." This is why it really ticked off their Jewish religious leaders when an upstart rabbi from hillbilly Nazareth claimed to be the Son of God with authority to condemn their ancient Jewish traditions. What really got them throwing dirt and rocks was when that His followers insisted He was alive and that the LORD loved Gentiles. If not for the dog-Roman troops invading their holy temple, they would have stoned Paul before he wrote Ephesians.

But way back in 700 B.C., the LORD God told the Jews of Isaiah's time, "***Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.***" (Isaiah 59:2 NIV) Yet their gracious God always spoke through the Jewish prophets His love for all the Gentile nations and promised to deliver them from sin that brought death and disease, war, famine and disaster into God's perfect creation. This is why He sent His Son for all the Jews and for all of us Gentiles too.

Sin's wall of separation between us humans and our Creator also separates us from each other. Warring spouses or warring societies all have the same selfish motivation that wants me first, you last, and God maybe never. Ancient hostilities between the Jews and Gentiles could only have one solution. To the Gentile Christ-lovers in Ephesus, another Jewish rabbi and apostle of Christ named Paul wrote: "***But now in Christ Jesus you [Gentiles] who once were far away [from God and His chosen people of Israel] have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two [warring Jews and Gentiles] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law [of Moses] with its commandments and regulations. His purpose [as the Christ for Gentiles and Jews] was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this 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 [Gentiles] who were far away and peace to [Jews] who were near. For through him we both [Jews and Gentiles alike] have access to the Father by one Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:13-18 NIV) There, my Jewish and Gentile friends, is God’s perfect solution. Wash away the wall of separation between people with the heaven-sent tsunami of Christ’s blood poured out on the cross. Provide one place for peace between God and man in the body of God’s one and only begotten Son. All you people, **Come Near to God – Through the blood of Christ.**

✠ **As members of God’s household (vv.19-22)**

Did you notice how this God-inspired letter to the Ephesians sparkles with passive verbs? Long time since English grammar, right? Do-it-yourself Americans loaded with how-to religious books don’t like passive verbs. Sure our natural lack of orthodoxy wants us to be **members of God’s household** sitting in the easy chair. But then always want to claim at least a little credit for saving ourselves.

But God brings us near to Himself like a fireman calling from a ladder to you and your children huddled just inside the window. “Climb out here! I’ve got you.” You don’t run off and tell your friends, “I saved myself from the burning building. I climbed out on the ladder,” do you? No, you tell how a brave rescuer put his own life on the line to get you out safely.

Jesus, the Master Builder gave His life for you. Now He is building His eternal temple out of blood-bought souls. We were unwanted immigrants in God’s country, but now He says, ***“You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”*** “**Being built together**” is a passive verb. God is the Builder; we are His materials. Who could think of a better way?

Most people don’t know the woodworking term “friction fit.” It’s a joint that pushes together without hammering, but can hold itself up by friction. Ancient builders could build joints so tight you still can’t slip a knife between the massive blocks. With ***“Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone”*** and living stones of souls like yours and mine ***“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets”*** there are no cracks in this invisible temple and no divisions among the **members of God’s household.**

But what should we do when cracks and friction appear in our homes or congregations and countries? **Come Near to God – Through the blood of Christ, As members of God’s household.** Maybe the news media, Muslims and Israelis won’t admit Jesus is the Christ of God, the only way to peace in heaven or on earth. But just because someone looks at your favorite hunting buddy and says, “That dog won’t hunt,” are you going to sit at home and grouse while the pheasants play “Duck-Duck-Goose”?

God’s perfect solution to man’s sin worked in heaven eternally and it still works in every heart and home where it is received by faith. One of my favorite stories was documented by a Jewish historian who could not see the answer to his question in his own title. He wondered how Gentile Protestants in France during World War II risked their own families to take in the children of Jewish refugees to protect them from the Nazi invaders. With no organizational meetings, everyone in scattered villages worked together without trying to force Christianity on the Jews. He was amazed only a few converted. But the title of his documentary tells the whole story: *Weapons of the Spirit.* All those scattered Christians were listening to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Savior of Jews and Gentiles. They were doing what the love of Christ prompts us to do if our Jewish or Muslim neighbors for that matter were being unfairly treated.

An ancient Jewish proverb says, ***“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”*** (Proverbs 31:8f NIV) That’s what Jesus did for us on the cross. Now He wants us to speak out for Him and invite everyone: **Come Near to God.** In Christ alone is true, eternal peace with God and man. Amen.