

Notes: *Draw Near to God* (Ephesians 2:16-18)

Intro: Christians know that they were once separated from Christ and alienated from God but now by Christ's blood and righteousness, God has brought them near. We are united to Christ as a branch in the trunk and we enjoy eternal communion with God as a result. This is our great privilege! All believers stand on the same level ground at the foot of the cross. Our responsibility? We must draw near to God through Christ regularly. What encouragements does Paul give us here?

#1: We are reconciled to God (16). Reconciliation is the bringing into a peaceful relationship parties who had lived as enemies with one another. Through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, sinners may be reconciled to a holy God and enjoy peace with him. Why is understanding this doctrine central to enjoying communion with God? We were alienated by sin. Reconciliation presupposes enmity. It is not merely that our hearts and minds had something against God. Far more fearful, God had something against us—our sin. Our sin alienates us from God. It makes us his enemies (Eph. 4:18; Col. 1:21). Adam and Eve, our first parents, experienced this in the Garden. They disobeyed. They created a breach in their intimate friendship with God and they hid from God (Gen. 3:8). God eventually banished them from the Garden (Gen. 3:23). The alienation they felt is that which all of us have felt. It's why our quest for meaning never ends. Why we are lonely in God's universe. We are reconciled by God. The answer to our alienation is reconciliation with God. Amazingly the gospel tells us that God reconciles sinners to himself. Before time they were chosen by God in love to be reconciled to him (Eph. 1:4). In time, the Father sent his Son to reconcile by his death those who were his enemies, cut off from him, and without hope (Rom. 5:8, 10). God did not wait for us to draw near to him, instead he took the initiative. Ryken: "This is true in election: God chose us long before we could choose him. It is true in deliverance: God rescued us when we could not rescue ourselves. It is true in redemption: God paid the ransom we could never purchase. It is true in propitiation: God has turned aside the wrath we cannot endure. And it is also true in reconciliation: God restores the friendship we cannot repair. Salvation is from God; if there is anything of our very own that we contribute, it is only the sin from which we need to be saved." This is why the Bible never says "reconcile yourselves to God" but to "be reconciled to God" and to "receive" God's reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:20; Rom. 5:11). We are reconciled through Christ. His cross, flesh, blood (vv. 13, 14, 16; cf. Col. 1:21-22). It's by Christ's representative blood-shedding that God is reconciled to us and we to him. We are reconciled by a judicial exchange. On the cross, God clothed Jesus with our sin and condemned him for it in order to clothe us with his righteousness and accept us for it (2 Cor. 5:21). The reconciliation given by God and accomplished by Christ must be received by the empty hand of faith apart from any works of our own (Rom. 3:28). Toplady: "nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling; naked come to thee for dress; helpless look to thee for grace; foul, I to the Fountain fly; wash me Savior, or I die." All believers enjoy reconciliation with God which is perfect and final (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18; cf. verb tenses).

#2: We have the peace of God (17). "Peace" is the well-being, rest, and contentment that comes from knowing I am in a right relationship with God—the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. This right relationship is not according to my merits but according to the merits of my Mediator, Jesus Christ. In the OT Aaron the high priest prayed peace upon Israel (Num. 6:24-26). David, the King of Israel, gloried repeatedly in the peace and safety God grants (Ps. 4:8;

29:11; etc.). Paul gloried in it just as much. Each of his NT letters begins with a prayer that his audience will experience God's "grace and peace." Note particularly how "Christ *himself* is our peace" (vs. 14). Peace is not simply gift received through Christ but a state of the soul known in communion with Christ (cf. Jn. 15:1-5). In communion with the Lord of heaven and earth we know "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding" despite our difficult circumstances. But how? By Christ "preaching" peace (17). How? We know God's peace: Through Christ our Priest. On Good Friday, Jesus was condemned to bring us peace (Isa. 53:5). On the first Easter Day, Christ appeared to his fearful disciples and preached peace to them (Lk. 24:36). Christ our peace offered himself up as a sacrifice to satisfy God's justice and give us God's peace. Now he intercedes in heaven for us toward that end (Heb. 7:25). Through Christ our Prophet. Christ preaches peace not only by his sacrifice but also by his word (cf. Heb. 2:12; Rom. 10:17). Christ preaches today through his Word preached.

#3: We have access to God (18). The peace of God, the fruit of our reconciliation, is kept in a state of repair by frequently drawing near to God through Christ, in prayer, worship, and Christian fellowship. Confident access is guaranteed by Christ's blood and the Spirit's witness by faith to our adoption (Rom 8:14ff.). Don't stand aloof from God! Draw near with rejoicing (Rom. 5:11)!