

Access To The Father

Ephesians 2:14-18

How would you like to have tickets to the 2014 Super Bowl? Sound good? What if I told you that you could sit on the club level, at the 50-yard line? Sounds even better! If you're a pro football fan, you'll be delighted to learn that the 2014 Super Bowl will be played next February 2 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, NJ — just outside of New York City.

And if you act fast, you can have one ticket for only \$10,165! What's that—you say you can't afford that? Okay, let's go for the cheap seats. If you have the money and are willing to pay the price, you can have access to the highest seat in the end zone for only \$2,440. And that's before the scalpers even get started.

It is highly unlikely that at those prices I will ever attend a Super Bowl, no matter who is playing. First, I don't have that kind of money, and second, if I did, I wouldn't spend it on a ticket to the Super Bowl. And I need not think that I can show up at the gate on the day of the game and waltz right in without a ticket. You see, the ticket gives me access.

Here in Ephesians we learn about another Event, one that is ongoing, this one also available only to those who have access. The Book of Ephesians has been called "The Grand Canyon of Scripture" for several reasons. It is unparalleled in its beauty. The magnificence of what we see here knows no equal. The depth of its majesty is unlike any other book in all of Scripture. In only six short chapters we have revealed to us the mystery of God available through Christ. And this is the mystery: that God has opened up the way for us Gentiles to be included in His marvelous plan of salvation.

Paul is addressing this letter to the Gentile Christians who were in Ephesus, and he reminded them in 2:11-12 that *before* we were separate from Christ, with no hope of salvation. He uses the analogy of the Temple, where the Gentiles could only approach the outer perimeter of the Temple, but could never go inside. They didn't have access at any price. Just as the Gentiles were shut out and excluded from worship, in the same way we Gentiles were excluded from any hope of salvation.

We had no hope of eternal life, and we could not even dream of approaching God. That whole dismal scene changes with the glorious words in 2:13— "*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the*

blood of Christ.” That “Prince of Preachers” Charles Spurgeon said about that verse that it is a gate of pearl turning upon hinges of diamond. The two hinges of diamond are the phrases “in Christ Jesus” and “through the blood of Christ.”

“*But now,*” Paul writes, all that has changed. In vv. 14-18, Paul elaborates a little more, and shows us some incredible things Christ has done for us. Follow along in your Bibles with me as we briefly survey the things that only Christ could do. In verse 14, He not only gives us peace, but He *is* our peace, and bringing peace, He has brought unity to His Body, the Church. In doing *that*, He has destroyed what separates us.

In verse 15, through His death, Christ has abolished the law with all its commandments and regulations, and has created in Himself one new body. In so doing, He has made peace between Jew and Gentile. Verse 16 tells us that He has reconciled us to God through the cross. And all of this is so we can have what we see in verse 18: “*For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*”

Access! That is something we could only have dreamed about. Think of it!—being able to approach God at any time for any reason! That’s something that not even the Jews could do—not even the High Priest could go in anytime he wanted to! But Christ changed that!

Look with me now as we take a closer look at this passage. How has Christ given us access to the Father?

1 He destroyed the wall that divided us, v. 14

Walk with me as we approach the Temple and let’s see how it was laid out. As you approach, you first would go through the Court of the Gentiles, so named because that was as far as a non-Jew could go. There was a stone wall about four and a half feet high that surrounded the entire Temple area. At regular intervals, there were stone pillars with an inscription written in both Latin and Greek, with this dire warning: “Let no one of any other nation come within the fence and barrier around the Holy Place. Whoever is caught doing so will himself be responsible for the fact that his death will ensue.”

Just beyond that was the Court of the Women, and it was reserved for Jewish women. As you advanced further inside, there was the Court of the Males, the Court of the Priests, the Holy Place, and deep inside, the Holy of Holies.

Remember that the High Priest could only go into the Presence of God in the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. And that was it—at no other time was this permitted. We Gentiles had no access even to the Court of Women, much less to the Holy of Holies, where God’s Holy Presence was. We were forever shut out, and that four-and-a-half foot wall reminded us of that fact every time we approached.

We read in verse 14, *“For he himself is our peace.”* The Greek language places heavy emphasis here—it means “Christ and Christ alone is our peace.” No one else could do this for us. *“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two [Jew and Gentile] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”*

Paul was speaking in a figurative sense. He said that Christ has destroyed that wall that separates us. But pay attention to this: there was a spiritual wall that divided not only Jew and Gentile, but divided us from God Himself. The death of Christ on the cross has abolished that wall, and we are able now to approach God at any time and stand before Him because of Christ.

This is a big deal. Paul also wrote about it in Romans 5, where he said, *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom we have gained access by faith** into this grace in which we now stand.”*

2 He created something totally new, v. 15

We read in verse 15 that Christ did this *“by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace.”* This had never been done before. Before you had Jews, and everyone else was a Gentile. The Jews were God’s people, but no one else was.

So we see in verse 15 that the “wall” he mentioned in verse 14 was the Law of Moses. Now it was important, for sure—God Himself had given it to Moses. But what the Law accomplished was to tell us how holy God is and how far short of His standards we all fall. We could never live up to all its requirements.

Some readers of the Bible today wave it and pound it and use it to condemn other people. And what they are doing is creating a wall between lost people and the grace of Christ. None of us could live up to the standards God has set in His Word.

Isn't that what the Word tells us—*“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*?

So verse 15 tells us that God through Christ has created something new. There are several words in the New Testament language which are translated “new.” They are similar, of course, but the one used here means “totally new,” something which has never been in existence before.

So here is how it works out. Before Christ the Gentile could not approach God, represented by the four-and-a-half foot wall. Before Christ the Jew could not approach God, represented by the Holy of Holies. Before Christ, even the High Priest could approach God only once a year. But Christ has changed all that. Now we all have equal access to God through Christ and His blood shed for our sins. What is totally new is that we all, Jew, Gentile, male, female, young, old—we all have the right and privilege to approach God at any time for any reason.

3 He has reconciled us to God, v. 16

Verse sixteen reads, *“...and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”* There is no longer any separation. There is no longer a barrier which stands between us and God. Once we have come to Christ and by faith have made Him Lord of our lives, once we have surrendered ourselves to Him and have given ourselves completely to Him, we have our sins forgiven and we are reconciled to God.

This is something God Himself did on our behalf. This is what we read in Colossians 1: *“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to **reconcile** to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”*

Two men had had a long-standing dispute, and could hardly stand to be around each other. When New Year's Eve came along, they found themselves at the same party. A mutual friend said to one of them, “You must reconcile with your friend. This is New Year's Eve, and you shouldn't be like this. Go over now and wish him a Happy New Year.” So the man crossed the room and spoke to his enemy: “I wish you a happy New Year—but only one.”

That wasn't reconciliation at all, was it? But this reconciliation Paul was writing about was the genuine thing. In fact, the word Paul used here means “to reconcile

completely.” You see, there was nothing left between us and God, once Jesus paid the penalty for our sins.

Several years after the Civil War, a Southern widow, whose name was Varina, moved to New York City, and supported herself by writing newspaper articles. One day she met Julia, whose husband had fought for the North in the Civil War. Over time they became close friends. What is remarkable is that Varina’s last name was Davis, and her husband Jefferson was the President of the Confederacy, while Julia’s last name was Grant. Her husband Ulysses had served the North as a general and would later become President of the United States. The two women made it a point to be seen together, hoping that their friendship would serve as an example for everyone, and that the deep wounds of the War could finally be healed.

That was reconciliation, lived out in the lives of two women who had every reason to be enemies. God has every reason to be our enemy, since we have willfully sinned and rebelled against Him and His Word. Yet He chose to reach out to us and bring us to Himself. And not only with Him—the death of Christ brings reconciliation between any who are at odds with each other. And since He has brought reconciliation, the only reason two Christians should be at odds with each other is because of sin that remains cherished and unconfessed.

We’ve been talking about access to the Father. But I’ve got something yet to share with you, something I’ve saved for the very end of this message. The word Paul used for “access” is a very important word. In ancient courts there was an official whose job it was to screen those who wanted to see the king. If you had an issue that you felt needed the king’s attention, you had to see this guy first, and convince him that your need was deserving of the king’s time. You did not get past this official—in fact, you almost literally had to go through him. If he did not think much of your request or your need, then you didn’t get in. He was the one who opened the door to the throne room, and announced your name to the king. Only the most trusted individual would be given this task. He was called the “prosagoge.”

When we come to Ephesians 2:18, we find a remarkable treasure, because that is the word that we find there. Jesus is the Prosagoge, the One through Whom we must go if we want to talk to God. But because the chief purpose of Jesus is to bring us to God in the first place, we can know with sweet assurance that when we approach God through Jesus, we get in! Anytime!

And that is the message today—that through Christ, the Prosagoge, we have access to God the Father. Our sins can be forgiven through Christ. Our prayers find the ear of God through Christ. Our trials and sorrows find their solace in God through Christ. Our heartaches find their soothing peace in God through Christ. Jesus is the One through Whom we approach the Father, without fear. It is an invitation that is always open and never closes. *“For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”*

How many remember the singing group “New Kids on the Block”? Back in the 1980’s they were pretty popular, especially among pre-teen girls. My daughter Jennifer was one of them. We heard that they were going to be in Memphis, Tennessee, and though we lived only 90 miles south of there at the time, tickets sold out very quickly—almost before we even heard about it.

Jenny was very disappointed, and I couldn’t stand by and do nothing. There were no tickets available, but her daddy had a plan. On the day of the concert I checked her out of school early, and headed toward Memphis, without telling her where we were going. She may have suspected, but she didn’t know for sure until she saw the marquee at the Mid-South Coliseum. But even she at that age knew that you don’t get into a concert like that without a ticket.

It didn’t take long before we found someone outside with two tickets to sell, at the regular price. And we got in! It was a long shot, but we had access! Several days went by before I could hear again, and my daughter’s perception of that group changed once she saw them in person, but we got in! And she’s never forgotten it.

This access we’ve been talking about today is much more important than a concert in Memphis! Will you approach Him now by faith? Will you have for yourself what He came to provide for you? Jesus gave us access to the Father by destroying the wall that separated us from God, by creating something totally new that had never been before, and by reconciling us to God.

But it doesn’t happen automatically. You may never have access to the Super Bowl, or to the President of the United States, or to the Queen of England. But you can have *this*, and this is the access that counts most of all. It is yours, if you choose to have it.