

Where Social Distancing Goes to Die

Ephesians 2:13-16

Jeremy Cagle, April 5, 2020

Hello everyone and welcome to another Sunday morning message here on our YouTube channel. We know that many of you are from our church family Grace Fellowship Chilliwack. But some of you are not you're from other places and we just want to say, we're so glad you found us here on the internet. If you don't know me, my name is Jeremy Cagle. I'm the teaching pastor here at Grace Fellowship Chilliwack. We're a Bible teaching, gospel preaching church in Chilliwack, British Columbia.

And this is our fourth time to do a sermon online like this, as it is with many churches right now. We've been asked to do this, in light of the coronavirus, to meet privately like this. So that is what we're doing. And just to say a few words about that. Earlier this week, I was talking with someone from our church family who was praying for me and they prayed that the Lord would help me to preach in season and out of season. That's what they prayed for that God would help me to teach his word in season and out of season; and I think that's probably a good way to summarize what life is like right now. This is a very out of season kind of thing. This is very unusual what we're going through right now. I've never pastored during a pandemic before; you've probably never lived through one before. This is new ground for all of us, and if you're not careful, it can make you anxious. It can really make you worried and afraid. There's a tension in the air right now; a lot of people are very nervous. And we would be as well as believers if it were not for the Word of God. If it were not for the truth that are found in Scripture, we would not know where to turn right now.

Several people have asked me right now, you know, "what can I do? I've got extra time on my hands. I've got an open schedule. I'm home with the kids, home with my wife, my husband, what do I do?" And I encourage you to get into the Word of God. If you have time on your hands, get into the scriptures. Every minute you spend on Facebook or social media, put two or three or four minutes into the Bible. That's where that'll calm your anxiety down. That's what gives you confidence to go on in life. Other people have asked me the question, "How do I serve the church right now? I can't see other Christians or it's very limited as to what I can do. How do I serve the body of Christ, my brothers and sisters in the Lord? And in response to that my wife and I put together some thoughts on this. We were thinking through this as well how we could serve you guys in the midst of all this time. And we put together a list. I sent this out to our church family via email recently, but I just wanted to mention some of these things to you. Make the most of your time as a family, pray together, play together, exercise together and work on your communication. Nothing helps you communicate more than just being isolated in the home together. But look at this as a positive thing. Many of you have more time with your family right now than you've ever had in your entire life, more time with those little kids, more time with your older children, teenage children. Maybe if you're just married, it's just the two of you; kids are out of the home, you have more time in that setting, take advantage of it. See that as a positive thing, it's God's gift

to you in the midst of this crisis. Also take the time to call someone instead of text. That seems like a very simple thing. But if you're not seeing people face to face on a regular basis, go out of your way to make sure you hear their voice and talk to them any chance you can. Also utilize technology. We live in a world where technology is coming out of our ears, we have so many wonderful ways to connect with people. There's several apps, WhatsApp, FaceTime, the Zoom that a lot of people are using right now that allow you to see someone's face when you talk to them. So take advantage of that. Before you go shopping, call a neighbor or a church member to see if they need anything. We've done that recently for some of our neighbors around here in the neighborhood. They appreciate it even if they don't need anything. It's just the fact that you've thought of them, enough to care about them. That's another thing you can do. If you don't have kids in the home drop off fun activities that a family with kids can enjoy. They will always remember that you did that. Listen, an old toy to you is a new toy to a two year old. And it will blow his mind, he will love it. So let's do that as well. Pray together over the phone. Some of our church members are currently praying the other once a week over a conference call. Set up a prayer team. Pray regularly for what's going on right now. Share the Gospel across the fence from your neighbor. We just mentioned taking time to study the Scriptures. But look at the scriptures. Topics like suffering, topics like pain. We're going to talk about the book of Job next week in our Easter message, but go through a book like Job. That's a wonderful book this study in a time like this, but these are all different ways. We could add more to the list but the bottom line is that you can still serve the Lord during this trial. You can still serve the Lord during the coronavirus. You can serve the church; it doesn't stop in the midst of this, the service goes on.

And if nothing else, something like this should make you grateful for the church that you have. It should make you thankful for the believer, the body of Christ that you're able to enjoy because you miss it right now. You miss seeing everybody. And I might add that you're missing everybody because you're in a family. Families miss each other loved ones can't stand being apart. Strangers don't do that. I mean, strangers, they don't care if they're apart from you. Matter of fact, a lot of them probably prefer that. My kids and I were walking through the neighborhood today, and they wanted to pet a neighbor's dog and we didn't know this person. They were a stranger. And so they had no problem at all telling us "Hey, don't do that right now. Stay far away," strangers are okay with that.

So are our enemies. And in fact your enemies want you to stay far away from them. They prefer that, but families don't. Families wants you to be close. They want you to be near and that's what we have here at Grace Fellowship Church. That's what the Lord has given us. He's given us a family. And so it's good to miss not being together. That's a blessing. In fact, some Christians don't have the opportunity to enjoy that.

In the closing days of World War Two, a plot was put together by the German people to assassinate Adolf Hitler and take over the nation. Some of you might have heard of it, but it was called Operation Valkyrie. And the idea was to overthrow the Nazis and fix the country before the Allies came in. But it failed and it went terribly wrong and all of the conspirators were arrested and put to death. One of them

was a pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The Germans were shocked when they saw his name because he was a he was an author, a famous pastor. He led a seminary as well. But he thought it was his duty to stop the Nazis. He thought God was calling him to stop their evil. And as a result, he was arrested. And he spent the last two years of his life in solitary confinement. He was all alone, and right before he died he wrote a book about that experience called *Life Together*. I don't know how he did that. I don't know how he got the book out in the midst of his prison term. He was basically bounced around from concentration camp to concentration camp. And in the book, he said this, he said, "The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer, because it is a sign, a physical sign of the Triune God. How inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who are privileged to live in daily fellowship with other Christians? What a delight it is, what a tremendous joy. Let him who has such a privilege thank God on his knees and declare it his grace, nothing but grace that we are allowed to live with other believers." I think we would all say amen to that, wouldn't we? I think we would all identify with what he's saying here. It is a grace to live with other believers. It is a privilege and a joy to have them in your life. We need to remember that.

I's so easy to complain about the church. It's so easy to criticize it and say, why isn't my church like this? Why isn't my church like that? Why don't I get to go to the big church with the big programs or the big whatever. And friends, it's a grace of God that you have any church at all. It is his mercy in your life that you have any body of believers to be a part of. It's His kindness to you. I spoke with a believer this week from Nova Scotia who called our church and told me that in a town of 350,000, people he couldn't find one solid church to attend. Couldn't find one gospel preaching church. Friends, you have one, you get to be part of one here at Grace Fellowship. And that's God's grace in your life.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning. That leads us to our topic today because today we're going to talk about the church. We're going to talk about the privilege of being part of a family like this, and we're going to do it in the book of Ephesians. So if He would open your Bibles with me to the book of Ephesians. And we're in chapter two. We're looking at Ephesians chapter two, because it tells us about the church. It tells us how it got started and what the Lord did to make this possible for you. And just to set the stage for what we're going to talk about, if you would read in Ephesians, two, verses one through 10. With me, it says this, Paul writes, and he says,

"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead and our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ. For by grace you have been saved. And he raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come, he might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you

have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we would walk in them."

If you notice, as you read this passage, Paul is describing something unusual in here. He's describing something amazing because he's describing the great change that takes place in you when you become a Christian. He's describing the great conversion that you have and if you notice, it's a conversion from death to life. It's a conversion as we've said many times from the very bottom of human existence to the very top of it, because you go from death to life. If you look in the past and you go from your sins and trespasses in verse one, acts of evil, acts of depravity to doing the work of God in verse 10. That's a change isn't it? That's a total turnaround of your life. And the reason I keep bringing this up, I've mentioned this several times to you, is because some people think when you're saved, it's no big deal. They think that when you're saved, nothing happens to you. Life just goes on as usual. Nobody can tell. That's not what Paul says here. It's not what you read in this passage. Paul says nothing goes on as usual after this. The whole world will tell when you become a Christian because there's a great change.

Others say that Christianity is not that hard you just pray a prayer, walk an aisle or it's a very easy thing to be a Christian. They say, "I was born into it." Paul says nobody was born into this. You have to be born again for this. Nobody enters the world a Christian; you have to go out one by experiencing what this says right here, we have to be born again. And the most amazing thing we learned here is that when that happens, it doesn't happen to you alone, this should really blow your mind. But what the text is saying here is that when you are changed like this, it doesn't happen to you by yourself. It happens to other people as well. You're saved one at a time. But you're not the only one in the universe that's been saved. Many others have as well. And if you read on in verses 11 through 15, Paul writes this, he says,

"Therefore remember that formerly you" the word you is plural there, many of you, "the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'uncircumcision' by the so called 'circumcision', which is performed in the flesh by human hands - remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 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 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."

I'll explain all of that to you more in a moment, but Paul goes on to say here that as a result of your conversion, as a result of the great change that God has brought about in you, you can be part of the

church. You can be part of a family who has experienced this because you changed along with them. You both experienced this together. The thing that draws you together as a church is not that you all have one race, you all have one upbringing, you all have one socioeconomic status. None of that matters. You've all experienced this. That's what brings you together. As a result of God's grace, as a result of his mercy, Jesus made both groups into one and he broke down the barrier of the dividing wall. You know, some people won't even get out of bed to go to church. And they won't give up their hobbies, or their sports or their games on a Sunday. This passage says God did more than that. God gave His Son. Some people won't even drive five minutes down the road. God went to the cross. So you could be part of this.

And I mentioned this because if we need to be reminded of anything right now it is this, if we need to be confronted over anything In the church, it's our it's our lack of commitment to it. I mean, some people have been Christians for years and never joined the church. They followed Christ for decades most of their life or they profess to and they've never committed. It's always on the fringes for them, they float in and float out. You see them at Christmas and you don't see them again until Easter. They're kind of holiday believers. Or this is very common right now. They watch a sermon online like this. They have a service over the internet and they say, "I'm good. I don't need anything else."

God says you do. God says you do need something else. He wants more than that for you because Jesus didn't die to save the internet. He died to save the church. He didn't die to give you a computer he died to give you a family of God. And this needs to be a priority for you.

Even in a time like this, even with a catastrophe where we're being told to stay alone, we need to have this in our mind. The Christian life is not all about doing stuff online. God wants us to be together, which is what we're going to talk about in this passage. So if you're taking notes this morning, in Ephesians, two verses 13 to 16, we're going to look at four places where our social distancing goes to die. That's our outline for today. That's what this is about. We're gonna look at four places where social distancing goes to die, and I gave the sermon that title, because this is a big topic right now. This is on everybody's mind. We're being asked to practice social distancing. We're being asked to stand apart, six feet apart at all times, which we should do. I mean, the government's asking us to do this, the medical community's asking that and we should comply to that. But that's not what I'm referring to here. That's not the distancing I'm talking about. I'm talking about the distancing that says I don't need the church. I'm talking about the separation that says, I don't need other people. Friends that has to die. You've got to put that to death. This idea that says I can go through the Christian life alone. I can go through the coronavirus alone. God says you can't. This is not for you alone. This is for the church.

You can't stay at home in front of your computer for your entire life and please God. You have to be with other believers. And we're going to talk about that today with four places where our social distancing goes to die, and the first place is in Jesus. That's what our text says. That's just what it goes on to tell us following along here. Paul says the first place where our distancing goes to die is in Jesus

Christ. He's the one who makes this possible. This was his plan all along. He saved you to draw you out of the world and put you into the church. And if you read in verses 11 through 14 again, Paul writes, he says,

"Therefore remember that formerly you" the word you is plural there, many of you, "the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'uncircumcision' by the so called 'circumcision', which is performed in the flesh by human hands - remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." very bleak biography, "But now in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace."

Just to say a few words about this, if you notice, this is the second time the word "but" is used in a major way in this passage. This is the second time Paul stops his train of thought to say you were this but now you are this. All these things were true of you, but now this is true of you. He says you have been brought near. You were once a Gentile separate from Christ, far away, but you have been brought near to God. Going back to the great theme of this passage, he has changed you now, it's another way of saying that that's a theme you're going to see over and over again, in the book of Ephesians. Because you were once a Gentile in the flesh, it says, called uncircumcision by the so called circumcision. This is in verse 11. Sounds pretty complicated, but it's really not, it just means that God had nothing to do with you.

You see, then in verse 12, with the terms that are used, it says you were separate from Christ, excluded from the Commonwealth, strangers from the covenants. I mentioned last week that we all know what it's like to be shut out of a border right now, right? We all know what it's like to have a great wall come up between us and another country. Paul says there was a great wall between you and God. You were a stranger, you were a foreigner, you were an alien and an outcast and you had no chance of salvation.

But verse 13, says, Jesus Christ changed all of that, because he brought you near. That means brought you near to God, brought you near to heaven. It's a spiritual term, not a physical one, it means he brought your soul or your spirit, your inner man near to God. Some of you before you were saved, you were so repulsive and so evil and so sinful nobody wanted to be near you. Family didn't want you, friends didn't want you, you didn't have any friends. God saved you. And he brought you near. It says by the blood of Christ, we might say by the death of Christ, because Jesus was Jewish. He was one of God's chosen people, and he was divine. Which means he was perfect. He never sinned. So he was always near to the Father always close to God. And in his death, he traded places with you. At the cross, he took your sins on himself. He gave you his righteousness. So you could be near to God as well. You could have the relationship with the Father that he had. Theologians call this the great exchange because Jesus exchanged his life for you. He traded places with you at the cross. As the song goes, "I owed a debt I could not pay. He paid a debt he did not owe." That's what he did for you. They also call this divine substitution, where the divine or the Son of God becomes your substitute. We all know what it's like for

a substitute to enter a hockey game. You're playing a hockey game and you're messing things up, you're having a very terrible game, the coach calls you out and puts a sub in to play in your place. Jesus lived in your place he was your substitute.

In fact, verse 14 says, "For he himself is our peace." And the way that's worded there is helpful because the word "he" is in the emphatic in Greek, which means that it wasn't just anybody who did this. It wasn't just anybody who died for you. It was he himself, God Himself, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. Lived in a perfect relationship for all of eternity with the Father. Always enjoying a perfect unity, never a broken moment in the entire scope of all the years before time began. And at the cross, all that changed for you to make this happen. We'll talk about that next week, actually, as well with the Good Friday service. We're going to talk about the cross and Jesus last words on the cross. But he died to make you part of the church.

Which leads to a couple of applications here. There are several ways you could really apply this to your life. For one, this means that there's nothing more unnatural than an isolated Christian. There's nothing more unnatural than a believer who says, "I have my computer. I've got the internet, so I'm good. I don't need anybody else." God says you do. Jesus says you do because he died for it. He didn't die to leave you all alone. He didn't die, so you could have a computer. He died so you can have a church. We've got to get rid of this attitude that says the world revolves around me. It's all about me, me, me. Jesus died for me. Everything revolves. That is not the way this works. It's not just about you. There are more people involved in God's plan of salvation than just you and just me. We have to remember that. It's a good thing. It's a beautiful thing. It means God is saving sinners.

In fact, if you study the Gospels, you'll see that the church is the only thing Jesus promised to build. He didn't promise to build a coffee shop, he didn't promise to build an internet chat room. He didn't promise to build Facebook, no offense to people who like Facebook. He promised to build the church. And he said, the gates of Hades will not overpower it, which means nothing will stop him from doing it. The work will go on and on and on. The Coronavirus won't stop it. A pandemic won't stop it. Governments that persecute Christians, they're not going to stop it. In fact, in some governments where they're persecuting Christians, the church is growing. Because the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Then when you come to the other books in the New Testament, you'll see they're all written to the church. With just a few exceptions. They're all written to groups of believers. To remind you again, you can't live the Christian life alone. It's impossible. You can't obey the New Testament letters by yourself because they weren't written to you by yourself. You can't be isolated, you can't be a maverick. You need the church.

It brings us to another application for this, another way to maybe balance that out a little bit, taking it from the other direction. And that is you have to come to Jesus before you can have all this. You have to believe in Christ before you can join the church. Jesus comes first, not second. Your relationship with Him precedes all else. I mentioned that because some people think it's the number one goal as

Christians, it's our number one goal to just invite people to church. It's our number one priority to just get them through the doors and fill up the pews. But we need to clarify something here. And that is it's our goal to bring them to Christ. It's our goal to lead them to Him. He's the one who makes this possible. He's the one who makes the church happen there would be no church if it were not for him. There would be nothing to take people to. Because he's the one who brings us near to God. I can't do that. I don't have the power to bring people near to God, you can't do that, you don't have the power; all of us together don't have the power. It's Christ and Christ alone. This is important to remember; you really can't forget this.

And there's a whole lot of uneasiness in the world right now, I mentioned that a moment ago. I've mentioned that I think in every sermon that I've done here in my office. People are scared. They're worried, especially as this thing drags on. Paul says the church is not going to fix it on its own. It can't. It takes Christ because it says he is our peace. That doesn't mean just that he knows the way to peace. It doesn't just mean that his words are peace. That's all true. He is our peace. Our peace is found in him.

The New Testament commentator, H.A Ironside said, "This means that whether I'm happy or sad, discouraged or encouraged, in the sunshine or in the rain, my peace remains unchanged because my Savior remains unchanged. He's still seated on the throne so my peace is still seated on the throne with Him." And I have to trust in that. I have to believe in that he will take care of me. It's been said that if Christ is all you have then Christ is all you need. That's true. totally true. In the good times or the bad, sunshine or the rain, Coronavirus or no Coronavirus. This is where your peace is. It's found in Christ alone. That means the world can't take it away. Evil men can't take it away. The gates of Hades can't take it away. Your peace is Him. Which leads to the next point to consider this morning.

Next place where our social distancing goes to die. The first one is in Jesus because He's our peace. He's the one who makes this possible because he brings us closer to God bringing us to the next point going on in the passage. Second place where our social distancing goes to die, and that is in one new man. The second place where distancing goes to die is in one new man. This refers to the fact that not only has Jesus brought us close together as a church, but he's brought us so close together that we become one. We become a single entity. Before we were a million different entities, especially in a church like ours. Our people come from so many different backgrounds. He's taking you from wherever you come from, and made you into one.

And if you read in verse 13, it says, "but now in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace who made both groups into one." If you remember earlier in this chapter, Paul wrote about two groups in the church. He wrote about the Gentiles and the Jews remember that? And it would be hard to say to two different entities and it'd be hard to say how much they hated each other in the first century. It would be hard to say how, how far apart they

were. They didn't get along at all. They fought like cats. But one of the Gentile philosophers Cicero said that all men are divided into two classes, Greeks and Barbarians, the civilized and the uncivilized, the cultured and the swine, because that's what the Jews were to him. They were swine. They were non persons. He hated Jews, couldn't stand them. And the Jews said the same thing about the Gentiles. In fact, they were even worse than this. Because they said the Gentiles were fuel for hell because that's all they were good for. They said God made the Gentiles simply to stoke the fires of hell. One Rabbi even went so far as to say that you shouldn't help Gentile mothers give birth because their children are just going to go to hell. So he told Jewish midwives, leave them alone. You're just going to damn them by bringing them into this world. That's how much they despise one another. And Paul says, In light of that, Jesus has made both groups into one, you can't overstate the importance of that. You can't overstate how big of a deal that truly was. We don't in Canada, we live in a pretty peaceful place, I would say. We have people from many different places, but they seem to get along for the most part, these groups did not get along. Until Christ came. Jesus changed all that. That phrase "made both groups into one," it could mean into one man or one person. Could also be translated make both groups into one thing, one new thing down in verse 15, which doesn't refer to time as much it refers to quality. It doesn't mean this happened recently, but it was new in the sense it had never happened before. This was completely new. It was entirely new. The church was something the world had never seen. It had never seen two groups come together like this. For centuries, the Jews and Gentiles were enemies. And there were numerous people that tried to stop that. There were numerous people that tried to bring them together. Alexander the Great was one. Alexander the Great conquered the known world, got everybody to speak the same language or was trying to, same culture, same Greek influence and it didn't work. Never stopped it.

The Caesar's, Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, Tiberius, they tried to unite the Jews and Gentiles. Even before then you had people like Nebuchadnezzar, Xerxes, Darrius, all those guys tried, they failed. Jesus succeeded. And I'd like to say more about that. But I need to move on to talk about the next place where Jesus does this.

The next place where social distancing goes to die, and that is through a broken down wall. If you're taking notes, to highlight what he's saying here, to show you how Christ made the two groups into one, Paul says Jesus did this through a broken down wall. He did it by tearing down the wall or the border that stood between them. If you read in verse 14. It says, "For he himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." And this is some really, I think, really interesting history here. But that phrase, the barrier the dividing wall, refers to the wall that separated Jews from Gentiles in the temple. There was an actual wall that did that, it separated them in their worship of God. If you can imagine something like that in our church, a big wall down the middle of us, you go here, you go there, that's what they, they actually had that. If you remember some history, Bible history for a moment, you'll know the temple in Jerusalem in the first century, it had had several courts in it. Four courts to be exact, and each one of them had a wall or partition between them kind of a barricade. Just to walk you through them, the first one was the Court of the Priests where the Holy of Holies was, that's where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. It's where the sacrifices were made. To

where the offerings were brought into the presence of God and they would kill the sacrifices there and present them there and burn them. They're making it of the greatest court. That was the holiest place there was that was as close as you could physically get to the presence of God, the Court of the Priests. Then farther out, second court, you had the Court of Men as you're walking away from that the Court of Israel where the Jewish men could go, the non priests and people like that. It wasn't as special as the first court, but it was pretty significant. You saw all the comings and goings of the priests there, the altar could be seen by foot by the court of men, you could almost reach out and touch it. So it was important as well. Then farther out, the third court you had the Court of Women, for Jewish women. That's where the supplies of the temple were. You had the great storage space at the temple, the oil and the wine were there. So we're the Treasury chest where they kept all the money, that was in the Court of Women. Matter of fact, if you remember the story of the widow's mite, when the widow put her last money into the Treasury, and Jesus rebuked the greed of the Sadducees and the Pharisees, that took place in the Court of Women, and then farther than that, after you pass all those other courts, you came to what Paul is talking about here. You came to the Court of The Gentiles. The non Jews could go, the strangers and the foreigners, the people that were talked about in verse 12. It's not a special place really. It was looked at with disdain by the Jews. This was where Jesus drove out the money changers and the people that were buying and selling. He said, "My father's house has to be a house of prayer for the nations." The reason he said nations there is because that's what the Gentiles were supposed to worship. And the Jews had made it one big auction block. This was the farthest you could go and still be in the temple. That was the farthest you could go and still worship God. In between the Court of Women and the Court of Gentiles was a wall, some massive wall with two big doors. They said that took 20 men to move them. And on the wall was a sign that said this. There's a copy of this sign in a Museum in Jerusalem but it said, "no foreigner may enter within this barricade, which surrounds the sanctuary, anyone who does so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." In other words, we will kill you if you cross this barrier. We will put you to death. The Wall was so thick between Jew and Gentile. It was so hateful, so spiteful, so cruel they would murder you over it. Might also add, this as an important detail that as you walked towards the Court of Gentiles from the other courts, you kept going down hill. Court Priests was up here. Court of Israel was about here. Court of Women was here, Court Gentiles was down here because that's how they thought of the Gentiles. They were the scum of the earth. They were beneath them, they were as far away from God as you could possibly be.

And Paul says here, again, you've got to understand the background and get what he's saying here. He says here that Jesus came to do away with that, as well. Not just their spiteful separation and their cultural separation or social separation. He came to do away with their spiritual separation. He broke down the wall that said, the Jews go over there to worship God and the Gentiles go over there. He took away the separation of it. Before there was a Jewish race, a Jewish way of doing things and a Gentile one. Now there's only one race there's only one people group and that is the human race. Before there were foreigners and Jews that was the inside group and the outside group.

Now Paul says you can all be inside in Christ, which leads us some applications here. There's several ways you can apply this to your life. One is that this means if you're in Christ, you are one with the church, one with the church. You're on the same level as everyone else. You're on the same level as the pastor and the elders, you're on the same level as the deacons. You're on the same level as that godly older lady who sits right next to you, we're all on the same level. There's no separation anymore. It's been torn down. There's not a high court in the low court anymore. There's not people who were up here and people who were down here, we're all down here. There's no second class citizens in the kingdom of God. Which means if you're fighting with someone in the church right now, you need to quit. If you're mad at someone and it's keeping you from fellowshiping with them you need to repent. Because that's putting up a wall where Jesus has torn one down. The walls need to go down

This leads to another application. And that is this, this is the good news if Jesus could do this back then he can do this now. If He could do this for the Jews and Gentiles as separate as they were, as far apart as they were, he can do it for anybody. He can do it for you and me. No matter our differences, he can do it for the people that we meet on the street, the lost people, people who are dead in their sins, they're still in verse 12. They haven't gotten to verse 13 yet. He can do this for anyone. In fact, it's the mission of the church, to let the lost world see this. It's the mission of the church to show them that the walls have come down. That's what we're here for. That's what God put us here to do. We're here to make peace.

In a time like this. It can be so easy to get this backwards. It can be so easy to get this wrong because so many Christians are on the offensive right now. So many of them are on the attack because they're scared and they're worried and they're frightened and so they're lashing out at everybody. Lashing out at the government, lashing out at the politicians, lashing out at the medical community. And they say this is one big conspiracy. This is all one big hoax or we say things like that. We're saying that because we forget what our mission is. Paul says, In a time like this, it's your job to make peace through Christ. It's your job to tell them that the walls can come down in him, not to put the walls back up again. This world is bad enough right now without our help in that in that direction. We need to make peace

The story is told of a young boy who was serving some foreign soldiers in a war and they thought it would be fun to play jokes on him. To make fun of him to pick on his accent and tease him and tie his shoestrings together and lock him out of his house until finally they realized that was not a nice thing to do. So they apologized to the boy. And the boy said, that's good. Now I can stop spitting in your soup. Friends, I have to tell you sometimes I wonder if things would go easier for us if we learned a lesson from that. Sometimes I wonder if the world would stop spitting in our soup as a church if we would stop making fun of them. Christians can get really nasty in times like this. And we don't need to do that. We can act like the Jews did, and said you guys are down down here below us. They're not. They're not. All can be saved in Christ. It's our job to show them peace.

Matthew Henry said peace is such a precious jewel, that I would give anything for it but the truth. I would give anything for it but my principles, and he said that because our peace shows the world this.

Our peace shows them who our Savior is. Our Saviour can make a change, like what Paul is talking about here. And leads us to one more point to consider this morning.

One more place where our social distancing goes to die just to review the other ones here. The first one is in Jesus. It dies in our relationship to him. Our distance dies as we believe in him and call out his name and then second is in one new man. It dies as we realize that Christ has made one new man out of the two; he brought us into one. Third, in order to do that, he broke down the wall that was between us, the wall that was between Jew and Gentile. He burned that to the ground. Bringing us to a fourth and a final place where our social distancing goes to die.

One more point to consider and that is through his flesh. This may be the most serious one of all the most of all. A sobering but a final place where our distancing goes to die is through his flesh, or we might say through Christ's death. And this is very serious. It's very sobering because it shows us how important this was to God. It shows us how important this was to Christ. The church was so important to him, that he died for it. He didn't just save us through His words or his teachings, although He did do that, to a degree. He saved us through His death. And if you go down and read all of verses 13 through 16. Actually, starting in verse 14, let's read that,

“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 man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross. By having put to death the enmity”

I'm not gonna say too much about these verses here, spend too much time on it because it repeats what we've already looked at. Paul is going back over some of these things, for the sake of emphasis. But he does this to show you what had to happen for the two groups to become one. That's what he's explaining here. This is what had to happen for the wall to come down. He says the Law had to be abolished. It had to be done away with because it was a barrier for the Gentiles. Like we just saw it kept him from the presence of God in the temple, both literally and figuratively. Commandments and ordinances did the same thing. All that's kind of talking about the same issue. It made strangers and outcasts of the non-Jews. So Jesus abolished it, it says. That means He took away its power. Its power to separate, the Law's power to divide. Jesus did away with that by abolishing in his flesh, the enmity or the hatred between the two groups. Jesus didn't do away with the law in every sense of the word. He still has a law for us to follow today you can read about that in the Sermon on the Mount that is a Law or a code for us to keep as believers. But it's not a law that separates a Jew and Gentile anymore. That's the point here. It's not a law that drives them apart. Verse 15, says, “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 man, thus, establishing peace.” That's the second time the word peace is used in this passage, it's the second time the phrase “he himself” is used to remind you this is where your peace comes from. This is where your salvation comes from. You get it in Christ, he himself. The Son of God. Second person of the Trinity.

Earlier in verse 15, it says, you get it in his flesh, verse 16, says through the cross, which is all important this is, let me tie this together for you. I don't know if we always feel the weight of this. I don't know if we always get this, but Jesus loved the church, enough to die for it. He loved it enough to go to the cross. Which means that when you come to church, you come to something sacred. When you come to church, you come to holy ground. Because the Son of God bled for it.

When you come to a place like Grace Fellowship, or any church for that matter, you come to something special in the economy of Heaven. I don't know if we always get that. I don't know if it means that much to a lot of people today. Because like I said, some of us can't even get out of bed to come to church. We can't give up our hobbies or our games or our sports on a Sunday. Jesus gave up everything. We need to remember that. We need to change the way we look at this and see it like He did. Every year in the US we celebrate the Fourth of July to remember the time the nation earned its freedom. We have Canada Day here in Canada, similar thing, and during both holidays, both countries, you see a lot of pictures of soldiers up everywhere, with signs over them that say things like "freedom doesn't come cheap." And "all gave some, but some gave all." And here what you're reading is that Jesus gave all for this. He gave everything he had for the church. Which leads me to ask me what have you given for the church today? What have you done for it lately? What have I done? If it means this much to Him, what does it mean to you? If he sacrifices this much to make this happen? How much have you sacrificed for it? I asked you this because you can't follow him if you don't do this. It's not possible. You can't serve him if you don't make the church a high priority in your life. So are you doing that today?

To ask it another way. In times like this when we're in the middle of the coronavirus? Do you say I miss this? I miss the church. I, I can't wait to be back together again. Or do you say, Man, it's so good to sleep in on a Sunday? Man, it's so good to not have to get the kids out of bed to get them dressed and out the door. What is your attitude in a time like this? Because I'll tell you something Jesus would not have said it's so good to sleep in. Jesus would not have said it's so good not to have to get the kids out of bed. He would have missed it. We should too. If we're his followers.

You know, I'll never forget about the time a friend of mine met a Russian Christian from the former Soviet Union. The old Eastern blockade. You guys remember the Iron Curtain kind of thing? And the Russian Christian asked him. She said "Do you have a Bible? Wow. How Many times if you read it?" my friend said, "Oh, ouch. I mean, here's this person who's never had a Bible, asking me how many times have I read mine?" And then the Russian Christian asked her this. She said, "Do you have a church too? Can you go to church anytime you want? Wow, how many times do you go?" Friends, let me let me ask you that question. If this Russian Christian asked you that, what would you say? If she asked you, how many times do you go to church? How would you answer? Let me tell you how you should answer that question. Let me tell you what you should say. You should say I go as many times as I can. I go as many chances as I get because this is God's grace in my life. This is his kindness to me. He

changed me for that reason. He saved me for this purpose, to be part of the family of God. That's why he did it. Friends. This is where our social distancing dies. This is where it comes to an end.

One of the doctors in our church, who's also one of our elders actually says social distancing is probably not the right term, physical distancing is more of the idea. Socially, things can go on, as they always have. But this is where this mentality dies. This is where the isolationism dies, is in knowing why you were saved. You were saved to be part of the church. And we're so glad you're part of this church here at Grace Fellowship. We're so glad the Lord has brought you to us. But if you're not part of a church, if you're watching this and you're not plugged into one, I want to encourage you to do that. today. Take these words to heart and make this a part of your life. Let me pray for that. Now, if you would pray to the Lord with me,

Father, we come to this passage with heavy hearts because there's no one who hasn't taken your time for granted. We do live in a place, we do live in a country in a nation where we can worship you freely, where we can put all of this stuff into practice without pushback and persecution and yet we seldom do. So many times Lord we fall short in this, but remind us Father of the great calling with which you have called us. Remind us of the salvation we have in Christ, in the change that has brought this about in our lives. Lord, thank you for your church. Thank you for other Christians, and the blessing they are in our lives. Lord in times like this, we miss them. We really do miss each other. And we do that because we're family because Christ has made us into one and we rejoice in that deeply.

Lord, I do pray for our brothers and sisters at Grace fellowship. Pray for the brothers and sisters around the world who are meeting alone right now, watching sermons alone. Lord would you draw our hearts together? Help us to make those extra efforts to be together during this time, so that we can apply everything we've learned here in this text. Thank you for your word, Father. Thank You that we can stand on it and not be anxious in troubled times. When we go out now into a dark world any way we can and shine the light of Christ and show them his peace. We pray this in Jesus name.

Amen.

Well, please join us next week for our Good Friday service and our Easter Sunday service. Until then, God bless you.