

**Scriptures and Doctrine :: God's Plan for Peace and Unity****God's Plan for Peace and Unity - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/3 11:28**

...not as the world gives...

Some of you may remember the thread called Replacement Theology. In it I asked some questions about the dividing wall—referring to the barrier between Jew and Gentile, mentioned in Eph. 2: 14.

Since then I have been whittling away at this topic, and have synthesized it into an essay, along with practical applications. I'll post bits at a time on this thread, God's Plan for Peace and Unity: An Exegesis of Ephesians 2:14-22.

For he himself is our peace who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with all its commandments and regulations.

His purpose 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." Eph. 2:14-16

Of course, it would be misleading to discuss God's peace and unity apart from a focus on Christ. The many prepositions linking to him: in his flesh (:15), through him (:18), with Christ himself... (:19) indicate that Christ is the embodiment of both peace (he himself is our peace :14) and unity (His purpose was to create in himself one new person :15 NLT). Christ accomplished peace and unity through the cross (:16) by destroying in his flesh the very root of strife and division: the barrier. (:14)

Next: "The Barrier to Peace and Unity"

Diane

**Re: A cultural barrier - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/4 7:51**

Paul wrote a letter to the Gentile converts in Ephesus (and area) to address a serious rift between the Gentile and the Jewish converts. The Greek Gentiles were not being allowed to worship with Jewish converts - who never fully separated themselves from certain aspects of Judaism.

A wall in the temple in Jerusalem symbolized the epitome of Jewish separatism. Josephus describes this wall as a stone barrier about five feet high. Posted on it were warnings, such as this one, found on a stone by archaeologists in 1871: "No man or other nation to enter... whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues."

In those days the Jews believed that the Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of Hell, that God only loved Israel... It was not even lawful to help a Gentile woman in childbirth, for that would be to bring another Gentile into the world." (Barclay)

"The wall of hatred and contempt that divided Jew and Gentile had been strengthened by centuries of mutual disparagement and mudslinging. A few more years and the pent-up hostility of generations would burst into an open flame, and one of the most cruel and bitter wars would be fought. It would result in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD." (Hendriksen).

As we study the book of Ephesians it becomes clear that Paul is not merely addressing a particular cultural problem in a particular time in history. He has in mind a far bigger picture—a plan of cosmic proportions: God's plan for peace and unity—accomplished through the destruction of a universal barrier.

Diane

**Re: The barrier to peace and unity - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/4 12:15**

The barrier to peace and unity

Just what was (or is) that barrier, the dividing wall of hostility? No doubt Paul would have been thinking of his own experience with the barrier when he was mobbed and arrested for allegedly taking a Gentile into the temple. (Acts 21:27-29) He was surely thinking of the stone wall in the temple - that excluded the Gentiles. Jesus had promised that he would destroy it, or rather, the temple (Jn. 2:19). And he did, through divine judgment when Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans in 70 AD. Yet the wall's destruction, in itself, hardly solved the problem. What really did Jesus tear down?

Paul goes on to say that Christ abolished the law with its commandments and regulations (Eph 2:15). Yet the law was good and holy, (Rom. 7:12) so how was it such a terrible obstacle to peace and unity? How did the Mosaic Law, which was God's glorious provision (2 Cor. 3:11) for Israel, a hedge to protect her and the aliens living there, to preserve her as a nation, and to bring honor to God turn into such a horrible curse? How did it develop into such severe racial, social and religious barriers?

J. Stott believes that the ceremonial law was the culprit and that Christ abolished that, but not the moral law. (Stott 1979, 100) However, nowhere does Scripture divide up the law. Then Stott claims that Christ did not abolish the moral law, but rather "abolished it as a means of salvation". However, Romans 4 states that the law was never a means of salvation: "not through law...but through righteousness that comes by faith..." (:15) - exemplified in Abraham. (4:6)

It is easy to see how the ceremonial law was divisive. It made an irresolvable distinction between Jew and Gentile. It influenced the Jewish converts to insist that Gentile converts first convert to Judaism.

Certainly the numerous add-ons over the years - the manmade prohibitions, traditions and rituals (Col 2:8-23) reinforced the barrier.

We all know, THAT problem has always produced barriers in the church.

"The way of peace they do not know" Is. 59:8

cont'd.....

**Re: a look at some boundaries - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/5 9:08**

SOME BARRIERS:

Unscriptural doctrines build barriers - such as the notion that predestination implies that God picked some in order to condemn others. The expositor Patzia, himself, inserts a barrier even while exegesis of Ephesians. He said, "Since baptism is mentioned in this great section on unity (4:1-6), one could infer that [Patzia] understood baptism as a sacrament of unity." (Pg 177 Patzia) By insisting that "baptismal language" refers to water baptism, Patzia is creating a potential barrier. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body... (1 Cor. 12:13). Unity comes by the Spirit, not by the works of human hands.

Reliance on human effort and man-made laws, along with the failure to see salvation as the work of God creates huge barriers. It fosters, pride, inferiority, bigotry, favoritism, selfish ambition, and self-centeredness - and the church ends up repeating the sins of the ancient Judaizers. Inequalities remain unchecked - racial, economical, status, gender, age, denomination, and so forth.

The brick walls of our beloved tightly-locked "temples" symbolize insurmountable walls for outsiders. The members within exercise their "in-house" sub-culture, while sin and divisiveness are either denied or suppressed by the formation of constitutions and policies - aimed to maintain a semblance of peace and unity. Of course those laws don't transform the heart, just the behaviour.

THE REAL BARRIER:

Before religious and relational barriers can be broken, we must acknowledge the biggest barrier of all - the barrier b

between us and God. The book of Romans explains how sin separates us all from God. The law is powerless to restore us to God because it can't extinguish our fallen nature. No law or human effort can bring us into peace and unity with God. Hendriksen says, "The reason why there is so much strife in the world, between individuals, families, social, or political groups, whether small or large, is that the contending parties, through the fault of either or both, have not found each other at Calvary. (Hendriksen 1967, 136)

In other words, Christ is our only hope.

**Re: The PROMISE of God's plan for peace and unity - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/5 9:18**

At this point I need to backtrack, and insert my "Introduction", which I had neglected to do. I feel that it is necessary in order to address potential confusion regarding my use of the word "predestination".

Introduction: God's Promise of Peace and Unity

God's plan to join Jew and Gentile into one race through Christ was no after-though; it was no Plan B introduced after the Mosaic Covenant had failed. God had it planned before creation (Eph. 1:4). Abraham saw it in the distance. (Heb. 11:10) OT prophets helped lay its foundation (Eph 2:20) by foreshadowing it to Israel: peace to those far and near (Is. 57:19) - that is, a coming Messiah, the Prince of peace (Is 9:6). NT writers pointed to those OT prophecies to prove Christ's authority.

Paul's emphasis in Ephesians on the theme of predestination (1:4-12) reminds us that God had this destiny all planned out.

This was exciting news for Paul's audience, the Gentiles. Paul said, "You also (!) were included in Christ when you heard the word of Christ... having believed..." (1:11)

How exactly would God unite people from all nations? That had remained a mystery. In Eph. 2:14-22 Paul unlocks this long-awaited mystery. It is the glorious new covenant hope - the good news of salvation!

Let's see how Paul unfolds this plan.

**Re: - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/5 12:16**

Oops! A glance back - and I can already see a potential "barrier" - in my word choices. (Does anybody else have "oops's" when they look back at their wordings?) Words can sure be dangerous - "stacked" with all kinds of insinuations - that can build walls of hostility. Let's not form one here!

It's about God bringing the Gentiles and the Jews "into one race" (I wrote) - but I am NOT leaning in the direction of homogenization - as some call the great "American Melting Pot" - in which cultural differences must be dissolved or "naturalized". "Such a vision is inherently violent because it necessarily excludes not just elements of reality that don't fit, but any person or group who sees differently. (Middleton/Walsh) "It leaves only two significant options: totalitarian control of the opposition or annihilation of it. (Gergen) (Do we ever see that in the Christian community?) That, I say, is just one of many human efforts to eradicate barriers. However, in practise, it just builds barriers!

Evangelical theologian, Don Carson, in his popular university lecture called, "The Intolerance of Tolerance" describes the modern belief that being tolerant means that you must never disagree with those who hold different views. But, as Carson asks, How can you practise "tolerance" if there is nothing you disagree with?!

... and now... on to God's marvellous plan for making "one NEW person" out of divided peoples.

"See, I am doing a NEW thing." Is. 44:19

"From now on I will tell you of NEW things." Is. 48:6

“The Lord will create a NEW thing.” Jer. 31:22

.... not as the world gives.....

Diane

**Re: God's Means of Peace and Unity - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/6 9:37**

14For he himself is our peace,  
who has made the two one  
and has destroyed the barrier,  
the dividing wall of hostility,  
15by 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,  
16and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God  
through the cross,  
by which he put to death their hostility.

So, why did Christ have to die? How did his death resolve this mutual hatred between the Jew and Gentile, and likewise all rifts in the human race? How did Christ bring peace and unity? It may seem like a redundant question to ask; yet I believe the pervasive evidence of division and hostility in our churches and among Christians, never mind our society, suggests that few understand the enormous implications of Christ's redemptive work - even though they may be familiar with the terminologies.

From Ephesians we can see that before any divided people can be unified in peace, they must be unified with God - redeemed, ransomed from the hold of the evil one. Christ accomplished this in his death and resurrection. According to Romans, he died to free us from sin and condemnation by crucifying our old sinful person - and thus the condemning power of the law.

“I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment produced in me every kind of covetous desire.” (Rom. 7:10)

God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:13-15)

In other words, Christ, through his death and resurrection, rendered the law inoperative and this nullified the charge against us. Through faith in him, (Eph. 2:8) we can be restored to God - with whom we have peace and unity - experienced in our new life, our new identity. Christ raises us with himself as a brand new creation with a brand new identity with Christ's nature in place of our old former person.

This is how he reconciles Jews and Gentiles, that is, all sinners to God. This is how he put to death their hostility. (Eph. 2:16)

The root of hostility is extracted.

**Re: Defining God's Peace and Unity - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/7 8:52**

PEACE:

The word peace occurs 92 times in the NT. Its uses include: a divine quality, inner rest and contentment, relational harmony, freedom from divine judgment, and reconciliation with God. Hendriksen describes the peace that God gives us through Christ this way:

“Peace is the inner assurance that all is well because the curse of the law has been removed, the guilt transferred, the punishment borne, salvation procured.” (Hendriksen 1967, 136) This is the product of God’s lavish grace (1:7) You have been saved through faith “... it is the gift of God - not by works” (2:8)

UNITY:

Our new life unites us with Christ and all redeemed people. There is one body and one Spirit... (4:4) As new creations we are all equal in Christ. Stott refers to this union as God’s New Society. Some call it the third race, some a new humanity. With the barrier dissolved, we have peace and unity with each other. That would certainly have been good news for the Ephesian Christians. Likewise it is good news for all who feel second-rate. I like how the ASV puts it: There can be neither Jew nor Greek,  
there can be neither bond nor free,  
there can be no male and female;  
for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28) This is good news indeed!

**Re: Did Christ ransom us from the anger of God or the stronghold of the evil one? - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/7 9**

Just yesterday I was alerted to the possibility that some of my "traditional" words may be obscure.

ex: "redeemed/ransomed" ...  
"crucified" (the old sinful person).

I am realizing that many of us may be quite comfortable with these words, but to those from "afar", on the outside of the blessings and knowledge of God, they are strange terms.

Even still, we who are "near", ie familiar with them may have difficulty communicating the implications - or even integrating them into our lives - a reminder that we ALL need to be brought into "God's New Society" (J. Stott)

How about this: Christ rescued us ...  
...by wiping out ... our old sinful person...

I saw an analogy through a friend who is having knee replacement surgery. Indeed, some things are better replaced than repaired. Certainly that would be true for our "old person".

So why did Christ die? Was it to purchase us back from God's anger or from the devil's clutches. What about the new life?

I am suspecting that there has been a focus on the first (substitutionary principle) and a lack of focus on the latter. I am wondering if that is why in my background I heard so little about the new life we have inherited in Christ's resurrection and so much about a legal transaction. Could that also be the reason for the lack of peace (inner or relational) and unity expressed in the Body - sometimes expressed in a punitive, negative outlook, worry, gloom.... that lacks the joy of the Lord - only experienced in our new person?

"The Lord gave his life that he might deliver us from this present world ." Gal 1:3, 4  
(but from an angry Father??)

That needs some thought.....

**Re: near but so far - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/8 7:56**

“Jesus came and preached peace to you who were far away (yeah, that’s me – a gentile!) and peace to those who were near (that’s been me too – close to the knowledge of God!)” Eph. 2:17

Being from a reformed background, I heard about justification by faith since in the womb. Then, when as a youth I first “asked Jesus into my heart” (having entered the evangelical community), I viewed myself as forgiven legally - the divine charge against me no longer applied. Jesus took the “big spanking” that I was supposed to get. Justice was fully paid. That was supposed to be good news. But I never did experience ecstatic joy over that. To be honest (now that I look back) that “truth” was no more than a “paper transaction” stored away in the safety box – waiting to be pulled out on the final day – to guarantee me entrance into heaven.

Even after I got “saved”, I still experienced my same fears and insecurities. I still felt like a nobody, less valuable than anyone else. I still let domineering people walk all over me. I still tried hard to please my authorities, and felt miserable when I failed to measure to their expectations (even if I was not wrong). I still tried to live by “the book” – doing the right thing – especially in the eyes of the “authorities”. For example I’d read (and enjoyed!) my “modern translation” out of the wary eye of the KJVOers.

I carried a lot of guilt because I could never do it all right. I had a hard time forgiving others for failing to prop up my need for approval. I could not forgive myself. Mercy and grace were foreign concepts.

And when I did happen to get it right, I felt good about myself – but it was a good feeling that arose from my own efforts, not from Christ. It was not the Lord’s joy that I experienced, but my own measly joy – so fragile, so easily blown away in the wind – like till the next insurmountable expectation descended on me.

My temporary experiences of joy were self-focused. My ability to rejoice with others and weep with them was primitive – at best. That’s because I still wasn’t “out of myself”. I needed REAL freedom, not merely assumed freedom. I needed the real experience of the real LIFE that Christ offered – the life that can only be lived in the Spirit. I was one of those Paul refers to as “near” but really I was just as “far” from the Father as the elder of the two prodigal sons. Though God was working in my life, I still needed to be rescued from the clutches of the devil. I needed to undergo new ownership. I needed to be brought into union with Christ.

I praise God that HE did just that - by the power of the Spirit. ..it is the gift of God Eph. 2:8 The implications have been enormous....

Diane

**Re: Mercy: Is this justice fully paid? - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/8 7:59**

I believe that a dwarfed understanding of Christ's redemption sabotages the freedom and blessed unity that Christ came to give.

The belief that Christ died primarily to take the punishment for our sins (God spanked him instead of us), then we may have unbalanced perception of God (ex: punitive primarily). Might this not be a reason we are too often stingy with mercy?

In Jesus’ parable of the unmerciful servant, (Matt. 18:21-35) it seems that the debt was not paid by anyone, just forgiven - entirely!

Is forgiveness only possible if a debt is fully paid – somehow? On what basis can there be mercy if full justice is a necessary prerequisite?

I'm not expressing these thoughts to be accusational, but to examine potentially faulty thinking. I cannot deny a subtle punitive reflex at times at work in me when I am faced with the wrongs of others. I highly suspect that this arises from the "old way" and not from Christ's new life.

I believe that Christ offered a brand new life, not merely a "justified" old self.

Diane

**Re: The enemies of peace and unity - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/8 12:46**

Scripture teaches us, by both historical evidence and doctrinal teaching, that "law" is an enemy of peace and unity. This is one of the most difficult truths to "get", and so we keep on finding ourselves sabotaging our God-given freedom - not only our own, but also the freedom of others - that is, the freedom Christ offered through the cross.

Grace and law are mutually incompatible. You can't be "married", ie, joined to both. See Rom. 7

Those who are married to law, and thus, rely on self-effort find nothing more offensive than the grace of God. The law abider will do all he can to preserve and reinforce his "concrete" wall - and this will always separate him or her from the children of Light.

When confronted with expressions of the grace of God, the law-clinger will respond like a spider who sees an insect flying freely about it. The spider will instinctively construct a huge web in which to trap the insect. Then it will enshroud the vulnerable creature with its thread - till it can't move any more, and then suck the life out of it.

If we find ourselves being robbed of God's peace and presence, this could be one of the reasons.

How do we guard and strengthen the life that God has birthed within us?

EDIT: Since there is nothing more valuable to us than the Life Christ has given us, this question deserves a LOT of thought. We will (must!) come back to this later.

**Re: The good news of peace and unity - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/10 9:57**

... came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. (2:17)

In Scripture the word preach is usually associated with the words gospel or good news. To preach is to "proclaim, bring or announce good news" (Verbrugge)

This is just what Jesus did during his earthly ministry - constantly! He traveled around proclaiming the good news with words and action. He preached the good news to those who were near, that is, the Jews who had the knowledge of God; and he preached to those who were far - far from the knowledge of God and the privileges associated with covenant Israel.

Through healing, Jesus administered the good news to those who were excluded from Temple worship, considered far away because they were defiled: the ill, the lame, the blind, and the demon possessed. He restored women, giving them equal value in his kingdom. He loved children. He walked and talked with Samaritans, something the Jews would never do. He offered his peace - comfort in a world of inequality and hatred. He said,

Peace I leave with you,

my peace I give you:  
I do not give you as the world gives.  
Do not let your heart be troubled  
and do not be afraid. (Jn. 14:27)

His teachings helped promote relational peace - peace with one another, ex the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are the peacemakers.

For future consideration: compare peacekeeping with peacemaking  
What's the difference?

**Re: He needs to meet the REAL Christ! - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/10 16:45**

While in a store today I saw a display of CDs of world music. The owner told me that he viewed this as a "small" effort towards world unity - by helping people appreciate world music. Needless to say, that led into a lively dialogue. His insightful thoughts about injustices and attitudinal barriers deserved an ear. Here was a thinking man, who carried a deep burden for the plight of our human race. I felt a bond with him in that respect.

But when it came to discussing the spiritual root cause of our inability to unify ourselves, I sensed a wall quickly rising up between us, of course resulting in his controlling conversational maneuvers - aimed to keep me from having an adequate hearing. When I expressed this observation, he quickly humbled himself and opened the door a crack.

But the walls were strong, reinforced with many layers of distorted perceptions accumulated over the course of his life. His religious background as a Catholic had led him to view "God" as a cruel excuse for horrendous injustice (inquisitions, etc). I tried to share about my Bible study about Christ's unity, but found that he wasn't able to hear. It was like driving down an impassible road - blocked every few feet. Then he disclosed another religious barrier - fresh on his mind. Yesterday a customer had reacted to him with what he viewed as a "dogmatic" rigid assertion: "Unless you ask Jesus into your heart you are going to hell". Of course the store owner had no clue what this meant. And so he got his "hackles" up, rejecting, not Christ, but his faulty understanding of the customer's claim.

What he desires so desperately is exactly what Christ offers: peace and unity. And yet, the man can't see it! He has yet to meet the real Jesus.

Our message of the GOOD NEWS will tend to sound like bad news as long as it strikes against the stone barriers - such as misconceptions, bad memories, self-will, bitterness, etc. Clearly, only God can soften the walls through the work of his Spirit.

Yet he has called us to be representatives of Christ. Experiences like mine today strip me of all my fine-sounding rhetoric, and leave me with nothing to offer other than my own life - just as others see it.

We are Christ's living letters. How do others read us?

Diane

Re:, on: 2007/9/10 17:23

Quote:

roadsign wrote:

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And when I did happen to get it right, I felt good about myself – but it was a good feeling that arose from my own efforts, not from Christ. It was not the Lord’s joy that I experienced, but my own measly joy – so fragile, so easily blown away in the wind – like till the next insurmountable expectation descended on me.

My temporary experiences of joy were self-focused. My ability to rejoice with others and weep with them was primitive – at best. That’s because I still wasn’t “out of myself”. I needed REAL freedom, not merely assumed freedom. I needed the real experience of the real LIFE that Christ offered – the life that can only be lived in the Spirit. I was one of those Paul refers to as “near” but really I was just as “far” from the Father as the elder of the two prodigal sons. Though God was working in my life, I still needed to be rescued from the clutches of the devil. I needed to undergo new ownership. I needed to be brought into union with Christ.

I praise God that HE did just that - by the power of the Spirit. ..it is the gift of God Eph. 2:8 The implications have been enormous.....

Diane

Thank you Diane. These are great ponderings as far as I've read. But I had to pause here because you must have made a mistake - in most of this post you are talking about me, surely, not yourself?!!! :-P

Jeannette

Re:, on: 2007/9/10 18:06

Quote:

roadsign wrote:

I believe that a dwarfed understanding of Christ's redemption sabotages the freedom and blessed unity that Christ came to give.

The belief that Christ died primarily to take the punishment for our sins (God spanked him instead of us), then we may have unbalanced perception of God (ex: punitive primarily). Might this not be a reason we are too often stingy with mercy?

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Is forgiveness only possible if a debt is fully paid – somehow? On what basis can there be mercy if full justice is a necessary prerequisite?

I'm not expressing these thoughts to be accusational, but to examine potentially faulty thinking. I cannot deny a subtle punitive reflex at times at work in me when I am faced with the wrongs of others. I highly suspect that this arises from the "old way" and not from Christ's new life.

I believe that Christ offered a brand new life, not merely a "justified" old self.

Diane

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One course I had to do in college was on the Atonement. The source book was Berkoff's book on doctrine. He gave the impression that there was only one true doctrine of the Atonement, the legal one of penal substitution. Even though other views were discussed, such as the fact that Jesus gained victory over Satan on the Cross, and that He died to give us His life, these, Berkoff dismissed as mere theories, not the Truth.

This idea is, I believe, dangerously unbalanced. Why can't all these attempts to explain what Jesus did for us be true?

Jeannette

**Re: - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/11 7:48**

Quote:

----- you must have made a mistake - in most of this post you are talking about me, surely, not yourself?!!!:-P  
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No, mistake, of course, sis! This "connection" is the blessedness of being on the same rugged road together - under the canopy of the Spirit.

Actually more could be said about this doctrine. According to D. Bercot, it arose from the Roman Catholic Church in the early centuries. It is opposed to the doctrine of the early church fathers.

Just goes to show that before we denounce the RC, we better pay attention to what we've adopted from them.

A question to ask: Why has it remained so popular in our various protestant denominations? What is there about it that the church likes?

Diane

**Re: He came and preached peace - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/9/11 7:54**

Â"He came and preached peace to those who were nearÂ...Â" Eph. 2:17  
Â"Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No I tell you, but division.Â" Lk. 12:49

It is rather obvious that Jesus did not bring universal peace, quite the contrary. The results of his preaching at times produced anything BUT peace. His healings often incurred the wrath of the Temple authorities. They were angry because they assumed that he had violated the law (Can you see how Jesus' preaching rebounded off that dividing wall formed by the law?) Actually, Jesus never did violate the spirit of God's law, but just their interpretation of God's requirements. They looked at it through a microscope and failed to see the grand picture: God's plan. Their myopia caused them to misinterpret the picture, and thus turn the small strokes into huge sweeping swaths.

Isaiah wrote:

Â"If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a riverÂ" Isaiah. 48:18

Clearly, it is really sin that creates division - not Jesus. It would be unfair to accuse Jesus of instigating division and hostility. He just exposed it - or rather, he identified the barrier: the refusal to trust God and receive the solution for their problem of separation from God (which they couldn't see either!)

Most of those in Jesus' "near" audience preferred their walls. Those walls, just like Adam and Eve's figleaves, gave them a "comfy" barrier from God. Their walls kept them from facing their nakedness, spiritual poverty, and wretchedness. Their walls gave them a sense of righteousness. Their walls (ie, the law) had become their god. And so it is not surprising that they reacted violently against any "force" that threatened their sense of security. Jesus was the biggest threat that had ever entered their tidy, controlled "society". They were not interested in any new "society" that include

d those "afar" (ie, God's grand plan).

And so, just like their ancient Babel builders, dispersion was their only means to salvation.

God's fiery judgments in history are really God's acts of mercy. Just like dynamite, they shatter our stone barriers, our self-made constructs. And they pave a highway to God's peace, found in Christ.

EDIT:

This is certainly true on a personal level. I'm becoming more and more convinced that if we don't see this truth operating in our personal lives - ie the work of trials, dispersions, etc we won't see it correctly on a larger scale: our society. We will end up being misguided "prophets".