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*A new life of reconciliation of Jew and Gentile (2:11–22)*

*Context*

Paul turns now to thinking more corporately about what God has done for the community. He takes the reality of the hostile and formerly separate Gentiles and discusses their relationship to Jews both before and after their connection to Christ. Paul is forging a new identity for them, or better, is asking them to recall God forging such a new identity for them. Jesus has brought together those who had been hopelessly at odds with one another and with God. This unit shows how Christ has become our peace, drawing together and p 72 reconciling that which had been estranged. In that act of peace tied to the cross, Jesus has made a new entity, the one new man, which now needs to grow into fullness. This corporate overview shows how salvation is about more than the saving of individuals;<sup>63</sup> it is about a restoration of the creation at all levels. This makes possible a different kind of relating in the world that is a goal of salvation and which can also attract others to God. The power of reconciliation is something the church needs to appreciate as it is one of the most concrete ways to display that God is at work. Here is yet another aspect of God’s working of power that the church is to appreciate (1:19). The doctrinal comment serves to underscore the prayer request.

There is another important point in this section. This unit is the ground for the good work of evidencing reconciliation that the church is supposed to carry out in the world. God has done a work of reconciliation between people, and not just between the individual and God. This reconciliation is the first work that is an illustration of where God is taking us as a community. In other words, 2:11–22 develops 2:10 as an example by reviewing the start of the journey. The work of our

unity together and of reconciliation with people is rooted in what God has done for us.

*Comment*

11. Paul now turns his attention to who the bulk of the Ephesians were as Gentiles before they entered into the promise by faith. What has been said of individual salvation also has a corporate application, so Paul opens this paragraph with *therefore*. How God saves the individual leads into what that means for a larger circle of relationships. One flows inevitably into the other. This is part of the summing up of all things in Christ (1:10). *Remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh ...* Remembrance is important as it reminds us where we started. It is all too easy to forget what God has done for us and where we once were after having been in a different place for a long time. Paul does not want them to forget how indebted p 73 they are to God so the present imperative (*mnemoneuete*) calls them to continue to recall these realities. The phrase *in the flesh* followed later in the verse by the reference to circumcision by hands looks at one level of identity—that initial, physical level of self-understanding for Gentiles and Jews respectively. In the flesh, before God acted, the Gentiles were far from God. This was *formerly*, the way things were before God acted to change them, as verse 13 will show. The ‘formerly but now’ approach mirrors the way Paul reviewed the salvation of the individual in 2:1–3 by starting with where they were before God acted. The theme of an important recollection, an *anamnesis*, forms the genre of the unit (cf. Exod. 13:3).<sup>64</sup> Doctrinal recollection is what Paul sets forth here.

Here also is the basis for the you-us contrast we have argued was previewed earlier. Jews and Gentiles were, at one time, quite separated from each other. A separation from God because of sin had left them also estranged from each other. One led into the other. These Gentiles were outside of blessing, called ‘*uncircumcision*’ by the so-called ‘*circumcision*’ that is performed ... by ... hands. Ezekiel 44:7, 9 shows this situation, something God was going to work to reverse, while access to blessing had also been part of the initial calling of the nation of Israel to be a blessing for the nations (Gen. 12:3;

<sup>63</sup> This idea, and the importance of a corporate perspective on salvation, is nicely discussed in Darko, ‘What Does It Mean to Be Saved?’, pp. 44–56.

<sup>64</sup> Schnackenburg, pp. 102–103.

Isa. 42:1, 6; 49:6). To leave people where they are, outside of God, is not the kind of community Paul sees the gospel envisioning.

Paul signals a problem with mere physical circumcision by his labelling of it as a circumcision *by human hands*. References to things done by hands are always negative in the New Testament (Mark 14:58; Acts 7:48; 17:24; Col. 2:11; Heb. 9:11, 24; in the OT LXX, Isa. 2:18; 10:11). This is Paul's first hint that Jews also needed what God would provide in Christ.<sup>65</sup> There is a circumcision of the heart that Paul regards positively (Rom. 2:28–29). There is the rite, the circumcision made by hands without the heart, and then there is having the heart behind the rite (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; Phil. 3:3). Paul is saying that without the heart, the act is irrelevant (Rom. 2:29; p 74 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6; Phil. 3:2; Col. 2:11), even though the rite was commanded in Genesis 17:10–14. Still Gentiles, as reported by Jews, saw this rite as odd and ridiculed it (Josephus, *Ant.* 2.137; Philo, *Special Laws* 1.2).

Yet the Gentiles were also on the outside looking in. They did not even have the rite. From a Jewish perspective, Gentiles lacked the sign of covenant relationship with God (Ps. 147:20: no other nation knew his ordinances).<sup>66</sup> The hostility between the two groups could be intense, as a book like 1 Maccabees shows during the Maccabean War. This event and others like it show that many Jews saw Gentiles as a threat to the practices of their faith. The estrangement was at two levels—from God and from each other—and it could be deep.

12. Paul now gives a résumé of the spiritual qualifications the Gentiles lacked before God acted: *in the former time you were without Christ, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, not having hope and godless in the world* (author's translation). The Gentiles lacked serious spiritual credentials in five areas. The last point in the list, that they were without hope and godless in the world, shows how dire their corporate situation was. The listing is the reverse of what Paul says about Jews in Romans 9:3–5 (also Rom. 3:1–2).

They were without a *Christ*. There was no expectation of a deliverer sent from God, a promise Jews had from long before (Gen. 49:10; Pss 2:1–7; 110:1–4; Isa. 9:1–7; Dan. 7:13–14; Mic. 5:1–4). Best

notes that a Jewish list might not start here because of the importance of the law and temple.<sup>67</sup> So starting here is a Christian perspective on the hope of the nation: they were looking for a Messiah.

The Gentiles did not have *citizenship* with the people of *Israel*, a chosen people of hope (Deut. 7:6–8). They stood *alienated* from Israel. The perfect tense (*apellotriōmenoi*) points to a continuing status. This is a reference not so much to a nation, since Rome occupied and controlled the territory of Israel, as to a recognized p 75 people: a community organized around the one true God. Not only were Gentiles alienated from that group, but there had also been a long history of conflict and tension between them.

The result was that they were also *strangers* to the *covenants*, the line of promises tied to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:8–18; 17:1–14), Moses (Exod. 24:1–8), David (2 Sam. 7:12–17; Pss 89:3–4, 26–37; 132:11–12) and the nation at large (Jer. 31:31–34; 32:38–40; Ezek. 36:23–36). There is some discussion about whether the Mosaic covenant is included in this as it is characterized by Paul as coming after *promise* in Galatians 3. Whether it is part of the promise or not depends on whether the Mosaic covenant is seen as tied to its stipulations or as a direction in which God is taking his people. In the former, it is not a covenant of promise. Ephesians 2:15 says as much at this level (also Gal. 4:24). In the latter sense, it is a covenant of promise because it pointed to the hope (Luke 24:44–47; Rom. 4). Wrapped up in this hope was the expectation of deliverance into a new unending life, the hope of resurrection (Acts 24:15; 26:6–8; 28:20; Rom. 8:30–38; 15:13). Note how the covenants have a promise. The hope is tied to all that comes with Christ, as the rest of the passage will show.

There are two outcomes noted at the end: they had *no hope* (1 Thess. 4:13) and were *godless* (1 Cor. 8:5; Gal. 4:8; 1 Thess. 4:5). Without a messianic hope and without a covenant connection to God with its hope of deliverance and life, Gentiles were on the outside looking in as far as Paul is concerned. There is irony here, because Gentiles followed many gods and considered monotheists like Christians and Jews as atheists for not having their array of gods. Ephesus was no exception as the city thrived because of its relationship to

<sup>65</sup> Best, p. 239, is probably wrong to see nothing negative here given the use of it being performed by hands. Still, it is a subtle criticism.

*Ant.* Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

<sup>66</sup> Bruce, p. 292.

<sup>67</sup> Best, pp. 240–241, 244.

Artemis. The issue from Paul's perspective was the lack of promise tied to those connections and the lack of real divine presence. The gods they had were 'gods in name only'.<sup>68</sup>

13. *But now* things had all changed. Paul introduces what God had done in Christ: *in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ*. The phrase *in Christ* is thrown forward for emphasis. This is where the revolutionary alteration of p 76 relationship took place. The reference to nearness does not mean proximity but entrance, as verses 18–22 make clear (cf. Acts 2:39). The argument is like that of Isaiah 57:19, although there it is likely about Jews whether near or in diaspora (cf. Acts 22:21) and it might include nations alluded to in Isaiah 55:5 and 56:6–8.<sup>69</sup> The idea of being near also came to be used of proselyte discussion in Judaism (*Mekilta* on Exod. 18:5).<sup>70</sup> Paul is saying that alienation and estrangement are gone—not only between God and these groups, but between these peoples as well. What Christ did changed the Gentiles' contact with God and also their relationship to Jews. The passive verb speaks of God bringing them near, so they did not have anything to do with this move; it was God's act that did it. It was the sacrificial death of Christ that made it all possible (Rom. 5:9; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:20). God forms a triangle by what he does in Christ; reconciliation pulls people together before God. Paul now shows exactly how because Gentiles are not the only ones who have been moved into this position.

14. Paul provides an explanation of how the Gentiles were brought near as this verse begins with the linking word *for*. The explanation begins with the note that Jesus *is our peace*. That explanation is set out in more detail in verses 14–18. This is not just about peace between people and God, but peace between peoples, thus *our peace*. The allusion to peace may evoke the messianic hope of Isaiah 9:6 and 52:7, where the gospel is associated with peace and the Prince of Peace. The latter passage connects to the idea of the near and far in Isaiah 57:19. This is what Jesus' death accomplished. Caesar may be exalted in society as responsible for Rome's peace, the Pax Romana, but Jesus is responsible for the peace of humanity.

He is the one *who has made us both one*. Jesus has brought the estranged together. He is the one who has *destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility*. The phrases *made* and *destroyed* are the first two of three uses of a participle in verses 14–15 to describe what Jesus has done. With that barrier removed, unity is possible. In fact, that is the point. The peace that has been made has reconstituted how p 77 Gentiles and Jews should see themselves in relationship to each other. They share a place in the body of Christ.

Believing Gentiles and Jews are one in Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 1:13; 12:12–13, 27). Jesus took the two groups and made them a part of each other as they were connected to him. He took what separated them and destroyed it. The term *middle wall* (*mesotoichon*) can refer to an outside wall or to a division in a house or temple (1 Kgs 6:16–17), while *partition* (*phagmos*) is often a reference to a fence that hedges one in (Isa. 5:2; Matt. 21:33; Mark 12:1).

It is much discussed what this division was and what produced the *hostility*, or enmity. There are three views. First, some interpret it in terms of the 4 ft-plus wall that separated the outer area of the temple from the inner area (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.417). This marked the limit to Gentile access to the temple area, marked by signs designating it as such: 'No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and forecourt around the sacred precinct. Whoever is caught will himself be responsible for (his) consequent death.'<sup>71</sup> Paul was arrested on the false charge of having violated this custom by allegedly bringing a Gentile into the temple area (Acts 21:29–30). The problem with this view is that it is hard to know if Gentiles far removed from Jerusalem and the temple would have understood the allusion. It might well be a picture of what is in view here, but the wall itself is not the point; rather, it is what it might symbolize. The picture of a renewed temple at the end of this passage in verses 21–22 might favour this option.<sup>72</sup> Against it is that the terminology for that wall does not match the term Paul uses here.

A second view suggests that Paul understood a separation of heaven from earth as rooted in Gnostic cosmology, such that Israel was protected from the errors of idolatry. The fullness of the

<sup>68</sup> So Foulkes, p. 88.

<sup>69</sup> Thielman, p. 158.

<sup>70</sup> Lincoln, p. 139.

*Ant.* Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

<sup>71</sup> Foulkes, p. 89; the citation is from the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*, vol. I.1, edited by H.

M. Cotton et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), no. 2.

<sup>72</sup> So Arnold, pp. 159–160.

phrase *middle wall of partition* and the reference to the law as an obstacle in verse 15 argue against this view, as it is not clear that partition points to heaven when the law is contextually in view.

p 78 A third, more general view is that the reference is a metaphor for the social and cultural separation of the two groups.<sup>73</sup> It is likely that this is what is meant, although the temple wall image might also be in play. Jews in Ephesus were known for keeping the law (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.228, 234, 240), so it is likely that the social distance the law created is in view. The law was seen as a fence in Judaism (*m. 'Abot* 1.1; *Letter of Aristeas* 139–142; *1 Enoch* 93:6). That enmity was destroyed by the death of Jesus, *in his flesh*, as we connect that phrase with the previous one rather than with what follows. Its placement between the two descriptions of activity in verses 14–15 has made its reference disputed, but its connection with the previous idea is more likely because of proximity. This placement is distinct from that of many translations, including the RSV and NET which tie ‘in his flesh’ to nullifying the law of commandments. The difference is not great as it is Jesus’ death that accomplishes this, but the question is whether Paul is focused on the point of origin or the result. Regardless of the view taken, the expression’s central location underscores how Jesus’ death is in the middle of all that has been accomplished. Jesus’ death brought peace, not so much by removing the enmity of the law itself, which was from God for a time (Gal. 3), as by addressing the attitude of distinction and pride that the law could produce, as well as the conditions of separation and condemnation it brought (Col. 2:14). Verse 16 has the phrase ‘bringing the hostility to an end’ to reinforce the idea here. What also opens up the opportunity for Jews and Gentiles to function together in peace is the shift in the role of the law. Jesus’ death deals with the law’s penalty, disposing of it. One consequence is that the law’s ascetic practices are no longer in play. Importantly, Paul highlights the p 79 practices that are no longer obstacles because Paul’s view of the law

focuses on the promise realized. So the law is still effectively present in the fact that the promise stands realized, so that other legal stipulations setting up that promise are no longer in force. Galatians 3 says this in a distinct way with a focus on circumcision. Those stipulations now put aside are in view here. It is the wall that Jesus destroys by what he did with the law in his flesh—not the law itself, as aspects of it still have value, but the attitudes and conditions of separation that the law produced. In the new temple (vv. 21–22; 1 Cor. 3:16–17) that Jesus creates, all the nations can share equally in access to and in the worship of God (see v. 18; Isa. 2:1–4).

15. The third participle of the sequence in verses 14–15 appears here: *when he nullified the law of the commandments in decrees* (author’s translation). So Jesus (1) made the two one, (2) removed the barrier that produced enmity and (3) nullified the law of the commandments in decrees. Jesus’ death took care of the law and its penalties. This third point gives us more details on the second point: it tells us how the barrier was removed. Jesus did what others could not do by bearing the law’s penalty and thus opening the door for a different kind of access to God (Rom. 3:19–31; 7:6). The impact was a shift in how God administers salvation: where the law was a primary guide before, now it is the Spirit in Christ (Rom. 7:1–6; 10:4; Gal. 2:19; 3:1–4:6; Eph. 2:18). The role of the law in ‘regulating the covenant relationship’ between God and people has passed.<sup>74</sup> The reference implies the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:1–6), a covenant that is not like the one made at Sinai (thus Jer. 31:32). So the nullification in view is this switch in the administration of God’s programme, which the Hebrew Scriptures had anticipated in the announcement of a new covenant. The reference to *commandments in decrees* tells us that it is the law as stipulations that is in view here. There are no distinctions here between ceremonial and moral portions of the law; all the stipulations are in view, and it is the penalties tied to that law that is the point of focus. Colossians 2:14 gives us even more detail, saying it was our

<sup>73</sup> So Lincoln, p. 141, though his idea of seeing an adaptation of a cosmic Gnostic reference is unlikely. It is not attested early enough to be in view; see Bruce, p. 296, who sees the temple barrier as possibly in view as part of a larger metaphor. The whole problem of views and the syntax is fully discussed in Best, pp. 253–258, who opts for the simple metaphor

of view 3 and takes the syntax as we do, with ‘in his flesh’ looking back. Hoehner, pp. 371–373, opts to take the ‘in his flesh’ phrase with what follows.

*Ant.* Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*  
*m. 'Abot Mishnah*, *'Abot*

<sup>74</sup> So Arnold, p. 162.

indebtedness that Jesus dealt with on the cross (Gal. 3:13). The law as promise with its direction of pleasing God is realized in p 80 Jesus and continues its life through the means the deliverer provides. Ephesians emphasizes the result, while Colossians tells us how that result came about. The pedagogue role of the law is gone (Gal. 3:25). It is in this sense that Jesus fulfils the law (Matt. 5:17–48; Gal. 5:2–15; 6:2). His provision enables us to do what the law pushed for in its stipulations: to love God and others (Rom. 13:8–10).

The results of Jesus' death on the cross changed the world and the potential relationships between people: *that he might create in himself one new man*<sup>75</sup> *in place of the two, so making peace*. This is the first of two purposes Paul notes for Jesus' work. Jesus has formed a new community. Just as if one is in Christ, one is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), so with Jesus' work there is a new community in the world. The new *man* is humanity reformed, no longer tied to Adam but now in Christ, incorporated into the new people God is forming from him. Colossians 3:10 also uses this image, and in that context we are told that in the 'new man' there are no distinguished groups of people but all share an identity focused on Christ. This is part of the workmanship God created us to be (Eph. 2:10; the Greek verb *κτίζω*, to create, is used in both verses). Both Jews and Gentiles who believe and benefit from what Christ has done are moved into this new entity. The picture is not of Gentiles becoming Jews or simply moving into their space. Those who were near and those who were far are both now brought into something new, which is why Paul calls it the *one new man*. We see the reconciliation in that we know they are Jew and Gentile, but now Christ unites them. The result is the 'peace' that Paul affirmed as tied to Christ in verse 14. This will be called 'one body' in verse 16. It is a new race in which the weaving together of that which had been separate is clear.

This has been called the 'third' race, neither Jew nor Gentile,<sup>76</sup> though we are to retain the understanding that God has woven these two together in a way that allows us to see the two made

one. There is no segregation in Christ, even in the midst of recognizing p 81 a distinction in where each group came from before being united, for reconciliation is only clear when the former estrangement is appreciated. In practice, this will allow each group some measure of distinction, as opposed to homogeneity (Rom. 14–15). Gentiles are not made into Jews or vice versa.<sup>77</sup> They are who they are and yet they now function side by side and together, with Christ uniting them rather than the law dividing them. Their bond of oneness transcends the distinctions they also might have in some everyday practices. This reconciliation is available only to those who embrace what God has offered, for this deliverance into reconciliation comes by faith (vv. 8–10). There is no idea in Paul of a dual covenant whereby Jews and Gentiles are saved by distinct paths to God. All roads come in and through Christ.

16. There is a second purpose to Christ's becoming our peace. Beyond the creation of the 'new man', Jesus' work also brings reconciliation of the two groups to God. So Jesus is our peace (v. 14) that he *might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross* (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:20, 22; 2:14–15). The term for *reconcile* (*apokatallassō*) has a prefix tied to it and is the first attested use we have of the term, along with Colossians 1:20 and 22. It makes the reference to reconciliation emphatic. The one 'new man' is now equated with the church, with the reconciliation going in three ways: reconciliation of Jews to God, reconciliation of Gentiles to God, and reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles to each other as a result. It is important to note that all are reconciled to God. Here is an indication that Jews needed the reconciliation as much as Gentiles. Unlike other restorations, there is no idea that the text is describing the restoration of a previously lost unity, as the separation had existed between these groups ever since the formation of the people of Israel. What has been regained is the purpose for which people were created—that is, to relate positively to the living God in a restored image of God. In other words, this is a core corporate goal of the p 82 entire exercise of salvation, and the

<sup>75</sup> This expression is translated as 'new humanity' (NIV, NRSV) or 'new people' (NLT) to show its corporate thrust.

<sup>76</sup> Lincoln, p. 144. See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.5.41; *Diognetus* 1—'new race' and not Jew or Gentile; Tertullian, *Scorpiae* 10.

<sup>77</sup> Fowl, p. 95, says it this way: 'For now let it suffice to say that the new person created in Christ brings Jews and Gentiles together into one body without requiring them to submit to a homogenizing erasure of their identity as Jews and Gentiles.'

church has an obligation to witness to this result of the gospel to show salvation's scope. In fact, doing so testifies to the character of the gospel in restoring broken relationships, even at a corporate and social level. These social implications of the gospel have often been undervalued in the church, which has often been slow to see the corporate reach of the gospel, preferring instead to focus on how salvation affects the individual. Yet both individual and corporate dimensions are present in this text.

Through that reconciliation, Christ finds himself *thereby bringing the hostility to an end*. The untranslated 'in it' that concludes verse 16 probably refers to the cross, not to Jesus; but the two are, of course, intertwined. If Christ were meant, we would expect a reflexive here, since Jesus is already in view as the actor in the sentence. The alternative reflexive does appear in a variant reading that is not as well attested. In addition, the enmity being removed does not involve any enmity tied to Christ himself, but a reference to him might suggest that is the case.<sup>78</sup> The act of Christ in his death removes the barrier and clears the shared path to God for both groups (Gal. 6:14). That one act was like a bulldozer clearing the way for access. The enmity here is different from the enmity in verse 14. There it was between the groups, while here it is between them and God, so the loop is now closed. Normally it is God who reconciles, but here it is the Christ. The divine act tied to salvation reveals the exalted status of Jesus.

17. Christ's work has led to a message for the world. He came and *preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near*. This is a reference to the goal of Jesus' life and coming and what has happened as a result of that, since in his ministry Jesus focused on preaching in Israel (Matt. 10:5–6; 15:24–27). The apostles, through the Spirit, preached that message, the roots of which are in what he came to do and be (Eph. 3:5, 8). The apostles are seen as representatives of Christ. Jesus' ultimate goal was wider than just Israel. So Paul talks of *you* and addresses the Gentile readers directly yet again, as he did at the start of this unit.

The reconciliation p 83 resulting from Jesus' life and death was for all the creation and those in it (Rom. 8:18–39).

The terms *far* and *near* repeat the contrast between Gentiles and Jews that has been evident in the entire passage. Peace was offered to both, and both received it in relationship to each other and to God. This looks back to verses 12–13, where this unit started. Those who were far away are now near. The language of Isaiah 57:19 is in the background.<sup>79</sup> The only difference with Isaiah 57 is that there the referents were Jews in exile; here it is all who are far away and can be brought near. The principle of that passage now applies to a broader group. The idea of evangelizing in the verse takes language from Isaiah 52:7. The preaching of *peace* represents an alternative to 'the hostile name-calling mentioned in 2:11' that is the result of Christ's work;<sup>80</sup> the injection of his presence changes everything. Paul ties the note of peace to Christ and not to the Pax Romana. That would be a counter-cultural note. The way to bring people together was not through the structures of the surrounding society but through what Christ has done.<sup>81</sup>

Ephesians 2:17 also looks back to verse 15, where believing Jews are also incorporated in the one 'new man'. The reference to peace fits with verses 14 and 16. So we have a verse that summarizes much of the unit. Paul says in verse 14 that Jesus is our peace, and in the current verse that peace is preached as a result of Jesus' coming (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:14–17; Eph. 6:15). To get to peace, one must respond to the offer.

18. Paul now shares what results from that peace: *through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father*. Everything Gentiles were separated from in verse 12 has now been reversed. They have a p 84 Messiah, they have a connection with Israel, they participate in the covenants and they possess hope in a relationship with God. Paul has extolled and recalled to memory the distance amazing grace has covered through Christ. Separation has been dealt with and distance no longer exists. In a Trinitarian take on the results of the proclamation, both

<sup>78</sup> So correctly argued by Best, p. 266.

<sup>79</sup> For the idea that Ezek. 37 is also in the background, forming a framework for the unit, see Suh, 'Use of Ezekiel 37', pp. 715–733.

<sup>80</sup> As eloquently put by Barth I, p. 266.

<sup>81</sup> This theme as it is manifested in Africa, but could be applied elsewhere, is shown in Yorke, 'Hearing the Politics of Peace', pp. 113–127. For how this reconciliation fits with other Pauline letters and how uniquely its cosmic scope is presented in Ephesians, see Turner, 'Human Reconciliation', pp. 37–47.

groups possess the Spirit and have access to the Father because of the work of Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 3:18). The point is not to refer to a cause but to the results of the response to the proclamation, because, as Hoehner says, ‘to say that Christ preached peace to Jews and Gentiles because we have access does not make good sense’.<sup>82</sup> To see cause here puts the cart before the horse. This is only the cause *if* one has responded. The Trinitarian theme is also in 1:4–14; 3:14–17; 4:4–6; and 5:18–20.

The key word is *access* (*prosagōgē*).<sup>83</sup> The picture is of access to the family and people of God, since it is *to the Father* they have access. Access that also gives the secure status of God’s family members is the point (Rom. 5:2). There is more than the idea of introduction here; it involves participation, so the term is intransitive in force. Whether one thinks of access in the temple because one is qualified to be there by the presentation of a sacrifice (Lev. 1:2–3, 10), or of an audience with a king (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 7.5.46–47), the point is the freedom to be present (1 Kgs 8:41–43; Isa. 56:6–8; Zech. 8:20–23). Christ’s death makes that possible both now and in the age to come. The book of Hebrews makes a similar point in speaking of our drawing near, which is a response to the access we now possess as believers (Heb. 4:16; 7:19; 10:19–22).<sup>84</sup>

The distance they have come since what is described in 2:1–3, 11–12 is amazing: from death, wrath and separation to entry and welcome. The two groups share the possession of the same Spirit, linking them to God and to one another, the sign of the new covenant (1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 3). There is no longer a distinction in terms of their access (Rom. 3:21–24; 10:12; Col. 3:11; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:4–10; Rev. 5:9; 7:9). The remark shows how important the *p 85* Spirit is to the gospel (Rom. 8:14–16; Gal. 3:14; 4:6). The gospel gives us not only salvation and eternal life, but also a way to relate to God during all that time. The presence of the Spirit makes them holy, a sacred space that Paul will develop into a picture of a temple in verses 19–22 (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

**19.** The access they have and the removal of the barrier means that reconciliation has produced a revolutionary result. The point is noted emphatically with the use of two Greek terms for ‘therefore’ or *so then* (Greek *ara oun*). Gentiles are *no*

*longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household.* The repetition of the *syn-* prefix from 2:5–6 underscores the unity that emerges when Jews and Gentiles are seen as *fellow* (or co-) citizens. The picture of being *members* in the *household of God* also underscores the entrance into the family of God and the new social community he has formed in Christ. Welcome to the family as a full member is the point.

The verse is first negative, in explaining what they no longer are, and then moves on positively to say who they are. They are *no longer foreigners*. This is a reversal of a status noted in verse 12. The second term, *paroikos*, anticipates the term to come in the verse, *oikeioi*: they were outside of the house looking in, *noncitizens* or ‘aliens’, but they are no longer such aliens; now they are in. Paul turns positive. The Gentile believers now share citizenship (*sympolitai*) with the saints and are full household members. This term of citizenship also links back to verse 12 (*politeia*). The picture is of full kinship with others. The family of God is made whole when Jews and Gentiles are united in faith in Christ (Gal. 6:10; Heb. 11:13; 13:14). There are no levels of citizenship in Christ; all share in the family. That family is made up of the saved of all ages, but what Paul is referring to here are those who are a part of this new house, the new man (vv. 15–16).<sup>85</sup> When all is summed up in Christ (1:10), he is the reason why we have what we have from God—not our ethnicity or anything else we might bring (Heb. 3:2, 5–6; 12:22–24); and what God has done in Christ is a turning point in that work. This is a heavenly citizenship (Gal. 3:26; Phil. 3:20). The term *saints p 86* refers to all those set apart to God in Christ as those who have responded in faith to the gospel. They do not earn that saintly status; it is a gift that comes with being the recipients of God’s grace. This will mean there is no preference for the Jew or Gentile, something Paul addresses more fully in Romans 11. God is building a new sacred space on earth in the midst of a creation needing redemption. So the picture of a temple will follow.

The church is a community whose corporate, multi-ethnic identity is central to its self-

<sup>82</sup> Hoehner, p. 388.

<sup>83</sup> BDAG, p. 876.

<sup>84</sup> Bruce, p. 301.

<sup>85</sup> Arnold, p. 168.

understanding and witness.<sup>86</sup> Their sense of community is tied explicitly to their being connected to God and his functioning presence, something that makes them as a whole a temple of the presence of God, both as individuals, as 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 teaches, and as a group, no matter their locale, as Ephesians 2:19–22 will affirm. The correlating responsibility is to show who we are in our relationships and in our vocations, something the household codes of 5:22–6:9 will develop along with the entire application section of the letter in chapters 4–6. This involves a push for a multi-ethnic presence, sensitivity and awareness across the church. Such awareness serves as a godly example of relationships within that community, before the world and in interaction with the world. It makes a people out of those who were not a people and transcends national or ethnic identities for those in Christ, yet in a way that honours each group that makes up the whole.

20. This new temple (v. 21) is built on a solid foundation, as Paul switches to an architectural image: it is a *foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone*. Since this is a new work (vv. 15–16) and the apostles are mentioned first, it is apostles and prophets of the new era that are in view, not Old Testament prophets. They are also seen as a unit because the two terms are tied together by one article. From these the building is being built. *Apostles* includes people like Barnabas, not just the Twelve (Acts 14:1, 4, 14; 1 Cor. 9:5–6). New Testament *prophets* spoke into the situation of the churches (Acts 11:28; 13:1–3; 21:9–10; 1 Cor. 14:4, p 87 6, 30–31). Paul will come back to mention this group as he discusses the ‘mystery’ in 3:5–6. He covers both groups in 4:11.

The essential building block is *Jesus* himself, referred to as a *cornerstone*, likely an allusion to Isaiah 28:16 LXX (cf. 1 Pet. 2:6). There is discussion as to whether the term *akrogoniaios* refers to a cornerstone or a capstone. However, the context here is clear: we are dealing with the building from the ground up without having reached the end of it yet. So a foundational cornerstone is probably

meant, as also in 1 Corinthians 3:10–17.<sup>87</sup> In singling out Jesus, it is also clear that his position is distinct from and crucial to the building, as is indicated by everything else the letter has said about him.

The metaphor works with others in the letter about Jesus. Elsewhere, when the body is meant, Jesus is seen as the guiding head at the top of things (1:22), but that is a distinct image. The two images work together to describe who Jesus is, but they are not similar images. They go side by side to make distinct points.

21. It is in Christ that the building also grows: *in him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord*. This new entity is a sacred space in the midst of a common world. The church is dynamic as it is growing (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5). The joining together of the pieces of the temple allows it to grow. Another *syn-* prefix of the participle *being joined* [or ‘fitted’] *together* (*synarmologoumene*) points to the repeated emphasis on God bringing Jew and Gentile together. The present tense sees this as currently taking place. This exact term will appear again in 4:16. The growth pictures the reality that more people are coming into the church, and may suggest that maturity is being added to the church all the time. The emphasis here is on the adding of people as the church grows, but their maturity is where the discussion is headed later. People are fitted into and are transformed in the church (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21). In Colossians 2:19, a metaphor using the body makes a similar point.

God is responsible for this fitting together, so it is something the parts of the temple should recognize. They are designed to function p 88 together. God also has given them all that is necessary to make that design work. The image is important as it takes a great deal of work to smooth the edges of stones so that they fit together to form a building. The fit is snug.<sup>88</sup> The term *the whole building* refers to the singularity of the church in all its locales. Grammatically, Paul could be referring to each church, but the image in the background is of the one foundation and the one building that is the temple. So the unity of the design is another key

<sup>86</sup> The idea expressed in this paragraph is developed with a nice treatment in Pereira, ‘Ephesians’, pp. 1–12.

<sup>87</sup> Hoehner, pp. 406–407, gives a detailed defence of ‘cornerstone’. Opting for ‘capstone’ is Lincoln, pp.

154–156. He sees it as fitting the idea of Jesus exalted as head.

<sup>88</sup> Thielman, p. 184.



point; God has brought them together to function together.

The term for *temple* (*naos*) is important. It refers to the most sacred part of the temple, the holy place and holy of holies (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). This is the place where God was said to dwell. The point is that the church is God's inner sanctum, the place of God's presence, in the world. We have truly been brought near. This temple is holy, set apart to God, and is that which represents him in the world. For a city that had its own magnificent temple to Artemis, the image is a powerful one. The real transcendent presence resides in the church, not with the goddess. The church's presence points to God's presence. In another series of texts, Paul makes it clear that we are accountable for how we function in this sacred space (1 Cor. 3:10–17; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Tim. 3:15).

22. Paul now focuses on the Ephesians in particular. In Christ as well (v. 20) they *also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*. Once again the *syn-* prefix on *oikodomeisthe* expresses that they are *being built together* into this dwelling place of God. As in the previous verse, the present tense points to a current activity. The term for *dwelling place* is *katoiketerion*. It is a rarely used term in the LXX referring to God's dwelling place whether in heaven or in Zion (Exod. 15:17; 1 Kgs 8:13, 39, 43, 49; 2 Chr. 30:27). Paul says that the Spirit activates and energizes the community. So, in Christ, a sacred dwelling of God exists empowered by God's Spirit. The Trinitarian activity is highlighted at the end of the unit.<sup>89</sup> God is in the midst of his people, and that includes the Gentile believers. p 89 These closing verses make it clear that to be brought near (v. 13) is to be brought in.

### Theology

The dominant idea of this unit is the reconciliation and unity God has brought across racial lines in the work of Christ for those in the church.<sup>90</sup> The constant refrain of 'together', repeated three times

in the closing verses, makes clear this emphasis on appreciating reconciliation as a goal of the gospel. The powerful bringing together of Jew and Gentile into a new sacred work of God in the world is the point. That idea of appreciating the power of God takes us back to the prayer request of 1:19. This appreciation is not just for individuals, but is a corporate idea to be shared across the church. Gentiles and Jews are to appreciate that all are full members of the household of God. Their shared identity does not obliterate who they were but accentuates the fact that it is God who has brought them together, giving them a new relationship and network, making them true spiritual kin. The passage calls them to recall these truths and then to act on them. The attitude runs counter to the normal ethnic focus people have. The point is not that people should not see race, but that they should live with an appreciation that races were designed by God in Christ to function together. As absent as that reality often is in the world, it should look different in the church. At the centre of it all is the work of Christ and the reception of it by those who are his.

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<sup>89</sup> Snodgrass, p. 139.

<sup>90</sup> For how this reconciliation ties together many scriptural themes in Jesus' ministry, Paul and Revelation, see Keener, 'One New Temple in Christ', pp. 75–92. Here is Keener's conclusion (p. 92): 'How central is our unity in Christ? It is central enough to transcend all other loyalties, so that loyalty to Christ entails loyalty to one another as God's family, above

all ethnic, cultural and earthly kinship connections. It is central enough that Paul repeatedly emphasizes it as a necessary corollary of the gospel. It is central enough that the worship God desires is a united worship of believers from many peoples and languages. We are different, bringing diverse cultural gifts; but we are one, for God, the Lord whom we worship, is One.'

