

2:11–22 ONE NEW COMMUNITY OF JEWS AND GENTILES

While the Jews-Gentiles divide was unquestionably the most significant of the divisions in first century society in the Roman Empire, for the apostle Paul, the most significant and unique characteristic of the Christian community was that it consisted of both Jewish and Gentiles believers in Christ.

Up to this point in the letter Paul has been emphasizing the privileges that both Jews and Gentiles enjoy in Christ. Now he turns to their unity in the church, drawing our attention to the need for unity among Christians today. Whether in India, Indonesia, the Philippines, or in smaller countries like

128. See the discussion of this point in I. H. Marshall, "Salvation, Grace and Works in the Later Writings of the Pauline Corpus," *NTS* 42 (1996): 339–358; also C. Crowther, "Works, Work and Good Works," *ExpT* 81 (1969–1970): 66–71.

129. In the Greek text, the word "his" is placed first for emphasis. The NIV, for clarity, has added "God's." The reference here could be to the original creation – in Colossians 1:16, the old creation, too, is "in Christ" – but it is more likely to be to the new creation. In that case, the reference provides a link with the next section. See Perkins, "Ephesians," 393.

130. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 97. Lyons observed, "The church is a graced community, enabled by God to live lives characterized by good works he planned for them to do." Lyons, "Church and Holiness," 242; contrary to Muddiman who says, "It is more likely that people, not what they do, are the object of divine predestination." He renders this verse, "in which God prepared us in advance that we should walk." Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 13.

Singapore, the church is being torn apart by various factors. Denominational or doctrinal factors, as well as sociological issues, play a major part in such schisms. Race and caste factors rear their ugly head both outside and inside the church. In India, caste is the widespread problem. The situation has not been helped by those who advocate church growth based on the "homogeneous unit principle,"¹³¹ despite ample evidence of the destructive consequences of importing caste distinctions into the church. "Only where, in the knowledge of common guilt, the will arises to accept the reconciliation offered by God and to be appropriately ready for reconciliation with one another have strivings for peace any real chance."¹³²

In this section (2:11–22), Paul argues that the church should no longer be perceived as a body of Jewish and Gentile believers but, rather, as a completely new creation – a "new humanity" (2:15). Paul uses the language of "far away" and "near" (2:13; 2:17) and the reference to "peace" in 2:14 is echoed in 2:17. This suggests that 2:13–17 constitute a self-contained, parenthetical statement on how Christ's death brought together a divided humanity.¹³³

The section divides into three parts:

1. In 2:11–13, the apostle first describes the Ephesians as they were before they became Christians. Then he uses the catchwords "once" and "now" (2:13) to describe the change that has taken place in their situation – as Gentiles, they had once been "far away" but now, as believers in Christ, they have been brought "near."
2. In 2:14–18, Paul explains that this change was effected by Christ's death. Christ has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God and, in so doing, has also brought these two groups together in the new redeemed humanity that has been created.
3. Finally, in 2:19–22, using three different images, the apostle describes the unity of all members of this new community. The "no longer" in 2:19 indicates that there is a reference to their former state (2:11–12).¹³⁴

131. A homogeneous unit is "a section of society in which all members have some characteristic in common." This is an expression commonly used in mission discourse.

132. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 126.

133. For example, Martin, *Reconciliation*, 33.

134. There are several parallels between the first and third sections: Gentile believers were once separated from Christ, aliens vis-à-vis Israel, foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God; now they have been brought near to God, in the Spirit, enjoy the privileges of being family members, fellow citizens, and part of the people of God.

The first and third subsections (2:11–13; 2:19–22) are marked by use of the second person plural. In the middle subsection (2:14–18), Paul uses mainly the third person, with God or Christ as the subject.

2:11–13 A Reminder of What They Once Were

The apostle begins by reminding his readers – mainly Christians who were "Gentiles by birth" – of their condition before God's grace changed them. He lists six points that characterized their former condition: called uncircumcised, separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, and without God.

First, they were "called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision'" (2:11). The Gentiles' lack of circumcision distinguished them from the covenant people, the descendants of Abraham. In the OT, the term "uncircumcised" – when used by the Jews to refer to Gentiles – was a term of abuse and contempt (1 Sam 17:26). Paul's deliberate contrast between those who are called "uncircumcised" and those who call themselves "the circumcision" suggests that he is intentionally playing down this distinction as one which has significance only to certain people – that is, those who belonged to the so-called circumcision party. Further, the reference to this circumcision being "done in the body by human hands" clearly suggests that there is a more important reality than this rite.¹³⁵ Colossians 2:11 explains that new rite: "In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands . . . when you were circumcised by Christ."¹³⁶

When writing to the Philippians, Paul counts himself among those who are "the circumcision," those who "serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3). Asian religions place great emphasis on physical acts as a means of displaying a person's commitment to a deity. These range from external marks and mutilations to symbols and secret rites. Paul was dealing with those who placed a similar emphasis on physical circumcision. In his letter to the Romans, Paul insists that true circumcision is not merely outward and physical but circumcision of the heart.

135. The expression "done by human hands" is used in the Septuagint (LXX) in relation to idols or false gods; in the NT, it is generally used to refer to human temples. Merkle cites the following: LXX: Leviticus 26:1, 30; Isaiah 2:18; 10:11; 16:12; Daniel 5:4, 23; NT: Mark 14:58; Acts 7:48; 17:24; Hebrew 9:11, 24. Merkle, *Ephesians*, 69.

136. In Hebrews 9:24, the same word translated "made with hands" is applied to earthly places of worship as contrasted with the invisible place of God's true presence.

by the Spirit (Rom 2:27) and argues that Abraham is the father of all those who have faith like his – whether circumcised or not (Rom 4:9–12).¹³⁷

Second, they were “separate from Christ” (2:12) – that is, they were not physically related in any way to the Messiah, who belonged to Israel. When writing to the Roman Christians about the privileges enjoyed by the Jews, as God’s chosen people, Paul concludes with the reminder that “from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah” (Rom 9:5). But clearly, this point, too, is significant only to those who placed much value on being the messianic people – the Jews.

Third, they were “excluded from citizenship in Israel” (2:12). They were “foreigners and strangers” (2:19) in relation to the community of God’s people, Israel.¹³⁸ Beare explains, “Before Christ came there was no communion of man with God except within the fold of the nation which he had made peculiarly his own. The rest of mankind, being alienated from him, was likewise alienated from the community of his worshippers.”¹³⁹ This constituted a significant disadvantage.

Fourth, they were “foreigners to the covenants of the promise” made to Israel. This was a tragedy. “That which was the fruit of God’s love for his Chosen People has become, by the almost compelling force of hatred, the occasion for contempt with regard to peoples as ‘strangers to the covenant of promise.’”¹⁴⁰ The plural term “covenants” suggests that the reference is not only to the covenant established through Moses but to renewal of that covenant with succeeding generations within Israel – “those solemn assurances of Israel’s destiny given to the patriarchs and to Moses.”¹⁴¹ The term “promise,” however, is in the singular and this suggests that it is supremely the promise of Messiah that is in the apostle’s mind.¹⁴²

Fourth, they were “without hope” (2:12). “Without hope” must have a specific reference – that is, it is related to the hope that was distinctively Israel’s.

Fifth, they were “without God” (2:12). This term appears only here in the NT, but must be understood in the light of 4:18 – “separated from the life of

137. See also H. C. Hahn, “Circumcision,” *NIDNTT* Vol. 1, 307–312.

138. “The reference is to possessing the rights, privileges and duties which go with belonging to Israel.” Best, *Ephesians*, 241.

139. Beare, “Ephesians,” 651.

140. J. M. R. Tillard, “What Is the Church of God?” *Mid-Stream* 23, no. 4 (1984): 363–380.

141. Martin, “Ephesians,” 1111.

142. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 110. O’Brien holds that the reference is to “the foundational promise made by God to Abraham.” O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 189. Best speaks of there being “a forward look in the covenants relating to the continuance of Israel which could be seen as indicating a promise.” Best, *Ephesians*, 242.

God” – as meaning “separated from the God now revealed in Christ Jesus.” Westcott comments,

There is a strange pathos in the combination. They were of necessity face to face with all the problems of nature and life, but without Him in whose wisdom and righteousness and love they could find rest and hope. The vast, yet transitory, order of the physical universe was for them without its Interpreter, an unsolved enigma.¹⁴³

As he does so often in his letters, Paul goes on to introduce the change that has been wrought in Christ using the two little words, “but now” (2:13; see also Rom 3:21; 7:6). In Christ Jesus, the impossible has happened, and those who were once “far away have been brought near.” Nearness to God is a privilege that many seek. What a message of hope this is to many people of our continent – communities and tribes still living in self-imposed distance from God. The message that came from the missionaries through the centuries was precisely this: that those who were once far have now been drawn near to God through the cross.

The *Dalits* or downtrodden – the outcastes of India – once separated from society and its gods, are now coming into the blessing of being children of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Once without hope, today they find themselves with an identity that restores to them their God-given dignity as human beings. The churches should warmly receive them.

In the OT, the expression “far away” generally refers to other lands and their peoples, and is used in relation to the Israelites who return to Jerusalem from those lands.¹⁴⁴ But the correlation of “far” with “near,” taken together with the reference to peace in the next verse, suggests that Paul has in mind Isaiah 57:19: “Peace, peace, to those far and near,” says the LORD.¹⁴⁵ There, God’s offer of peace was made to all Jews, whether they were near or far – that is, in or outside Palestine. In Jewish midrash, however, the terms “near” and “far” were regularly applied to Jews and Gentiles respectively. “In later Judaism, ‘near’ marks out the Israelite as distinct from non-Israelites.”¹⁴⁶ Here in Ephesians, the Gentiles are described as those who were once far away but

143. Westcott, *Ephesians*, 36.

144. See Isaiah 5:26; 43:6; 49:1, 12; 60:4–9; 66:19.

145. The allusion to this verse is clearer in verse 17.

146. W. Bauder and H.-G. Link, “Goal, Near, Last, End, Complete,” *NIDNTT* Vol. 2, 53. See also Strack-Billerbeck, iii, 585–587, cited by Caird, *Paul’s Letters*, 56.

have now been brought near by the blood of Christ. There is, however, some ambiguity regarding the terms "far away" and "near," since the idea of the Gentiles being brought "near" to the Jews is also present. "[Gentile Christians] were once 'far off' but through their faith in the atoning death of Christ have been brought 'near' to the true Israel and thus to salvation."¹⁴⁷

Paul uses two qualifying phrases: "in Christ Jesus" and "by the blood of Christ" (2:13). The phrase "in Christ Jesus" is preferably understood as meaning "[by being incorporated] in Christ Jesus." The phrase "by the blood of Christ" refers to Christ's death on the cross as the means whereby the Gentiles have been "brought near."

2:14–18 Christ Our Peace

In this subsection, the apostle describes further consequence of being brought near to God. He begins with a statement: "For he himself is our peace." This is far more than a feeling. The biblical concept of peace is that of wholeness. "Soteriologically, peace is grounded in God's work of redemption. Eschatologically, it is a sign of God's new creation that has already begun. Teleologically, it will be fully realized when the work of new creation is complete."¹⁴⁸

Christ has brought peace by making "the two groups" – that is, Jews and Gentiles – "one" – a single unity.¹⁴⁹ He has done this by "destroy[ing] the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (2:14). In the temple of Jerusalem, the wall that separated the outer court of the Gentiles from the inner courts (into which only Jews could enter) was the tangible symbol of the barrier between Jew and Gentile. Perhaps Paul had this wall in mind when he refers to Christ destroying the dividing wall of hostility.¹⁵⁰ But there are several objections to this interpretation of the imagery. First, there is no known document where this wall is referred to using the word *phragmos* that Paul uses here; the common

147. Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 123.

148. See H. Beck, C. Brown, "Peace," *NIDNTT* Vol. 2, 776–783; Best explains, "Peace is the end of alienation; people can be alienated from God, from one another or internally alienated; the first two aspects are present here, the third is not. Peace as salvation is God's gift." Best, *Ephesians*, 252.

149. In the Greek text, the term *he* is placed first for emphasis. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 112; Mitton suggests that a rendering like "He and no other" may be needed to convey the intended sense. Mitton, *Ephesians*, 105. The change from the second person plural to the first person in verse 14 signifies that what is said in verses 14–18 applies to Jews and Gentiles without distinction.

150. For example, Mitton, *Ephesians*, 106; Beare, "Ephesians," 655.

word for a physical "wall" is *teichos* (compare Heb 11:30).¹⁵¹ Second, at the time of writing, this wall in the temple was still standing.¹⁵² Further, although such a reference would have made good sense to Jews, it is debatable whether it would have meant anything to Gentiles living in Ephesus and surrounding areas in Asia Minor.

Therefore, it is more likely that the reference is to the Torah, which served as a "barrier" (*phragmos*) around Israel, separating it from the Gentile nations. "This specific function of the Law is to prevent fraternization with Gentiles and preserve Israel from their idolatry."¹⁵³ From the perspective of the Gentiles, however, it constituted a dividing wall of hostility, for it was the Torah that was the basis for the prejudiced attitude of Jews towards the Gentiles.¹⁵⁴ "Setting aside" of the law (2:15) was necessary for the creation of a universal church.¹⁵⁵ "Christ brought an end to the hostility separating Jews and Gentiles by abolishing the laws that kept them separate and giving them shared access to God."¹⁵⁶

The Jews of the first century distinguished themselves from Gentiles in two major ways. First, they had the mark of the covenant, namely, circumcision (2:11). Paul has already implied that this distinction was neither universally recognized nor intended to be permanent. Second, they had the "law with its commands and regulations," an elaborate system of legal observances that publicly distinguished Jews from Gentiles.¹⁵⁷ Christ has "destroyed the barrier,"

151. See N. Hillyer, "Wall, Hedge, Palisade," *NIDNTT* Vol. 3, 948–952. The word used in the temple inscriptions is *tryphaktos*.

152. This, of course, assumes Pauline authorship of the letter. However, even if it is assumed that the letter was written after AD 70, it is still unlikely that the reference is to the barrier between the Jewish and Gentile courts in the temple. For in AD 70 the entire temple was destroyed – not just this wall separating the courts.

153. Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 127. But Muddiman rejects this interpretation.

154. For example, O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 196; Perkins, "Ephesians," 399; contrary to Best who contends that it is unlikely that the author of Ephesians or anyone like him who quoted the Pentateuch approvingly would accept "dividing wall of hostility" as a description of the law. Best, *Ephesians*, 256.

155. This interpretation finds confirmation from the wording of this verse where the demolition of the wall is explained as the abolishing (i.e. rendering void) of the law's enactments which, in the rabbinical view, served to isolate the Jew from his neighbor. Martin, "Ephesians," 1112; but Muddiman has major objections to both these interpretations and opts for a third: "It (the dividing wall) is rather constituted by all the expressions of social enmity, familiar to any Jew or Gentile in the Hellenistic world, the differences in place of residence, manner of worship, food and dress, politics and ethics, and above all the blank wall of mutual incomprehension, fear and contempt between the two groups." Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 127–128.

156. Lyons, "Church and Holiness," 238–256.

157. "Paul is wanting the Gentile audience to realize that, while they are free from the boundary markers of Judaism . . . they are also to be appreciative of the role that Israel and the law have played in effecting this unity." Weedman, "Reading Ephesians," 11.

that is, "the dividing wall of hostility" "by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations" (2:15a).¹⁵⁸ He "set aside" the law with its commands and regulations in the sense that in the new humanity that he created, consisting as it does of Gentiles and Jews, having the law do not privilege one over the other. Paul encouraged Jewish Christians to keep these observances, as he himself did. However, he strongly opposed any attempt to force Gentile Christians to submit to them. That Christ "set aside" the law as a requirement for entering into salvation "in his flesh" (2:15) corresponds to the words "by the blood of Christ" (2:13) – both refer to Christ's death on the cross.

The intended purpose was "to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace" (2:15b).¹⁵⁹ The reference here is to the Christian community viewed corporately.¹⁶⁰ Paul makes a similar point elsewhere: "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation" (Gal 6:15). The characteristic feature of this new humanity is that the barriers that normally exist between people have been removed. Caird comments, "A physical barrier may be removed and leave unchanged the people it once separated. But the removal of a barrier of hostility involves a profound personal change, nothing less than a new creation."¹⁶¹

Paul D. Devanandan developed the idea that reconciliation in human society is the outcome of humans being reconciled to God. He uses the concept of *lokasamgraha* to develop his idea of the church's service to society. The Sanskrit term *logasamgraha* – which occurs twice in the Bhagavad Gita – means "the maintenance of world order" and this is the goal of *niskāma karma* or disinterested action as a religious person involved in service of God and the welfare of the world. Such service or ministry is offered primarily in terms of

158. The genitive is a genitive of apposition. So the dividing wall of hostility describes the barrier further. The word rendered "set aside" is a late word that in secular Greek means "to render inactive" or "to do away with." "Though *katargeo* is elusive in translation, its basic meaning of rendering something inoperative is clear and constant." J. I. Packer, "Abolish, Nullify, Reject," *NIDNTT* Vol. 1, 73. See also Liefeld, *Ephesians*, fn 71: "(the law) should no longer be a factor in alienating Gentiles."

159. The Greek can be understood either as "in him" (Christ) or "in it" (the cross). But the context suggests that the NIV is correct in interpreting it as a reference to Christ rather than to the cross. The significance of the words in himself is brought out well by Schnackenburg: "Christ does not perform the role of a builder who constructs a new, unified building from separate parts and as it were sets it up on view; he builds this new entity in his own person, it is he himself in a new dimension." Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 115.

160. Bruce, *Ephesians*, 55.

161. Caird, *Paul's Letters*, 59. The Indian humanist Devanandan comments, "God himself in Christ has initiated a reconciliation between men and God, which breaks down the barriers and takes in the whole network of human relations." Cited by Morton, "The Humanism of Paul D. Devanandan," 18.

meeting actual human needs wherever necessary, but it should also fulfil God's ultimate purpose for humans.¹⁶²

Today, similar barriers are being broken down. In India, in the past, the Brahmins distanced themselves from the lower castes, particularly "the untouchables." In modern days, these untouchables (who prefer the term *Dalit* or oppressed) fight against Brahmin domination claiming their rights as human beings. The coming together of the Brahmin and the *Dalit* could be as significant as that of the Jew-Gentile union. In churches, they mingle as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

Paul describes Christ's purpose as being "to create in himself one new humanity out of the two" and "in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (2:15–16) – that is, bringing their mutual hostility to an end and making them one body. Jew and Gentile have been reconciled to each other within the body of Christ because they were first, each in turn, reconciled to God.¹⁶³ This reconciliation has taken place "in (this) one body," and it has been rightly observed that the body metaphor would have been inappropriate, if hostility had existed between Jewish and Gentile Christians.¹⁶⁴ The body would cease to function if one part of it was hostile to another.¹⁶⁵ Paul says that they were reconciled "through the cross" (2:16) – that is, on the basis of Christ's redeeming work accomplished on the cross. In the parallel passage in Colossians, Paul puts it like this: "God was pleased . . . through him [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things, . . . by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col 1:20).

Guthrie comments, "Although there is no indication how this [reconciliation] results from the cross, the statement requires for its understanding the view that the death of Christ achieved on the God-ward side an effective reconciliation by the removal of hostility."¹⁶⁶ But O'Brien disagrees, arguing that "it was in his reconciliation of both Jew and Gentile in one body to God that Christ killed the enmity. The same event is described from two perspectives, first in positive terms [reconciliation], then in negative categories [removal of

162. See Siga Arles, "Mission in the Indian Cultural Context: The Significance of Paul David Devanandan," *IJT* 32, no. 5 (1993): 55–63.

163. Contrary to Merkle who suggests that we have a new stage of the argument here and the reference is to the hostility between God and his rebellious creation. Merkle, *Ephesians*, 74.

164. See B. W. Fong, "Addressing the Issue of Racial Reconciliation according to the Principles of Eph. 2:11–22," *JETS* 38 (1995): 565–580.

165. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 745.

166. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 490.

the enmity).¹⁶⁷ Beare comments, "This is indeed a 'peace without victory.' The Gentiles . . . are not beaten into submission to the religion of Israel, but are given an equal part in the making of the new man."¹⁶⁸

In 2:17, we find an echo of Isaiah 57:19: "Peace, peace, to those far and near." It is evident that it is the Gentiles who were "far" and the Jews who were "near." To both groups, Christ's peace has been preached. First, there is a significant change in the concept of peace: earlier (2:13–16), the emphasis was on the peace that has been established between Jews and Gentiles within the new humanity in Christ; and now, the author moves to the peace that has been established between the Jews and God on the one hand, and the Gentiles and God on the other. Second, the question arises: When did this preaching of peace take place? Some think the context favors the idea that the peace Jesus effected on the cross is itself a proclamation to the world that peace has been accomplished. But there is much to be said for the alternate view that this is the preaching of the earthly Jesus or of his disciples.¹⁶⁹ Those who hold that the reference is to the preaching of the earthly Jesus say that the Gospel tradition presents Jesus as aggressively taking his message to those on the fringes of society – those who might be described as being "far off."¹⁷⁰ But, since the words "far off" are never used to refer to the groups Jesus reached out to, the reference may be to early Christian mission, where the gospel was preached to the Gentiles.¹⁷¹ This peace does not merely remove hostility but brings both Jews and Gentiles into the presence of the Father.

Under the old dispensation, the Jew could enter the presence of God on certain conditions; the Gentiles could do so only if they became Jewish converts. But, in Christ, the way into God's presence – "access to the Father" – has been opened for both Jews and Gentiles.¹⁷² "Access to a monarch in virtue of the full rights of citizenship may be part of what is meant. But this merges into a primarily cultic reference, approach into the presence of God through worship with all the barriers of ethnicity and law removed."¹⁷³ Paul speaks of

167. O'Brien observes that in Paul, when the participle follows the main verb, the action is usually coincidental. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 205. See also Beare, "Ephesians," 658–659.

168. Beare, "Ephesians," 658.

169. For example, Patzia, *Ephesians*, 197.

170. For example, Mitton, *Ephesians*, 109; Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 137.

171. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 217.

172. "The barrier that divided is broken down, and access to God previously a bone of contention between Gentiles and Jews is declared to stand open to all races. Moreover, the access works on a new plane, since it now betokens the horizontal communication that Christ makes possible." Marin, *Reconciliation*, 34.

173. Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 138.

access "by [literally, in] one Spirit." The idea of access suggests subjects of a court being presented to their monarch, but it is possible that the imagery here is actually taken from the OT context of coming into God's presence bringing offerings.¹⁷⁴ The one Spirit indwells both Jewish and Gentile Christians, and it is by him that they gain access to the presence of the heavenly Father. It is as Jewish and Gentile Christians live together in the common sphere of the Spirit that they have access to God's presence. "He [the Spirit] is the one who is the dispenser of spiritual blessings (1:3), and yet it is also he who enables those initiated in Christ, to be able to experience this nearness to God."¹⁷⁵

2:19–22 Images of the One New Humanity in Christ

In this section, Paul uses three metaphors to show the complete equality of privilege that Gentile believers enjoy in Christ alongside those of Jewish birth. The first metaphor is of a city: "You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people" (2:19). In the old dispensation, Gentiles could live in Israel – but only as foreigners and strangers, without the rights of citizenship. Paul says that this is no longer so. They are now entitled to all the privileges of members of the people of God. In the OT, the expression rendered "God's people" (literally, "the saints") was reserved for members of the nation of Israel. But now, in Christ, God's people consist of both Jewish and Gentile believers. Gentile Christians share, together with Jewish Christians, "citizenship in heaven" (Phil 3:20).

This raises the question of the relationship of the "one new humanity" to Israel, the former people of God. In Romans 9–11, Paul argues that Gentile believers have been incorporated into the one people of God, while unbelieving Jews have been excluded. The criterion for belonging to the people of God is faith in Jesus as the Christ. In Ephesians 2:14–18, however, the argument is along different lines. The image of the one new humanity in Christ might be likened to a third race – different from both Jews and Gentiles. The point being made is that, in the old dispensation, only the Jews belonged to the people of God. Now, in the light of the creation of the third race, Gentiles, no less than Jews, have the right to belong to the people of God. But no attempt is made to relate the "one new humanity" in Christ to the former people of God, Israel.

The second metaphor is that of a household: "members of his [God's] household." Both Gentile and Jewish believers are members of God's family,

174. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 209.

175. Lemmer, "Body of Christ," 487.

with all the privileges and responsibilities this entails. The picture of a family is an apt one for the Asian context, where kinship bonds are still relatively strong. With racial and tribal conflicts tearing people apart and causing disintegration in society, the Christian emphasis on bringing people together into one family is particularly significant.

Paul now moves to the third metaphor – a building, which is a “holy temple” (2:21). The inhabitants, members of God’s family, have now become the building materials. No less than six different derivatives of *oikos* (“house”) are used here to describe the spiritual reality of the community under the metaphor of the temple and of the building. In this building “the apostles and prophets” constitute the foundation with “Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (2:20).

The phrase “the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” can be understood in several ways. The apostle could be saying that the church is built on a foundation that belongs to the apostles and prophets (possessive genitive). The reference could be to the foundation that is laid by the apostles and prophets (genitive of origin).¹⁷⁶ However, it is likely that the foundation itself consists of the apostles and prophets (opposition genitive).¹⁷⁷ The two terms “apostles” and “prophets” are governed by the same definite article, which suggests that they refer to a homogeneous group of leaders in the early church. So designating the apostles and prophets as the foundation means that

those influential personalities of the early period have a “fundamental” function and a continuing meaning for the structure of the Church. . . . the Apostles are those people in the early years who first preached the Gospel and vouched for it, . . . whose authority is established because they were “given” by the Lord to the Church (cf. 4:11). . . . the “Prophets” must relate to inspired people in the early Church, who, along with the Apostles, contributed to the elucidation and proclamation of the Gospel.¹⁷⁸

176. Martin, “Ephesians,” 1112.

177. For example, Bruce, *Epistles*, 227–416; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 122–123; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 153; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 213; Merkle, *Ephesians*, 80.

178. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 122; Merkle observes that most commentators take it that “the apostles are seen as a subset of the prophets.” Merkle, *Ephesians*, 80.

As stated in the introduction, there is no contradiction between what Paul says here and his claim that “no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11).¹⁷⁹

Paul describes Christ as the cornerstone (compare Ps 118:22) or capstone – either to one of the large cornerstones that bind together two rows of stones – especially in the foundations – or to the keystone that completes an arch or structure.¹⁸⁰ While this second alternative (capstone) became popular after the work of Jeremias, it is more likely that the first (cornerstone) is correct.¹⁸¹ Letham comments, “The imagery seems to favor the former [cornerstone], for the structure grows upwards after the apostolic foundation is set in place and so after Christ founded it. If he were the final capstone, the developing building would be without Christ for the entirety of its construction, an obvious incongruity.”¹⁸² The juxtaposition of foundation and cornerstone suggests that the apostle has in mind the words of Isaiah 28:16:

See, I lay a stone [*’aven*] in Zion,
a tested stone [*’aven*],
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation.

The double mention of the Hebrew term *’aven* suggests that “cornerstone” in Ephesians 2:20 refers to a stone of some importance in the foundation. “The crucial cornerstone was the first laid for the foundation, the lowest stable part of a building, and the position of all the other stones in the foundation was determined by this cornerstone.”¹⁸³ “The [sentence] construction both distinguishes Christ from the apostles and prophets and draws attention to Christ’s unique role as the most important component in the building.”¹⁸⁴ Paul’s main thought is that Christ unites the separate parts of the building into a whole; Christ is the cornerstone rather than the foundation.¹⁸⁵

179. As against Beare who says he finds it difficult to put the two texts together. Beare, “Ephesians,” 661.

180. This was first mooted by J. Jeremias in his article “Cornerstone, Capstone,” *TDNT* 1, 137; so also, Beare, “Ephesians,” 661. This interpretation is supported on the basis that “its location at the top of the arch fits Ephesians’ consistent references to the exaltation of Christ.” Perkins, “Ephesians,” 351–406; Bruce, *Epistles*, 304–306.

181. For a list of reasons why it is difficult to make sense of the interpretation that Jeremias supports, see Mitton, *Ephesians*, 113; Merkle, *Ephesians*, 81.

182. Letham, “Ternary Patterns,” 67.

183. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 124.

184. Merkle, *Ephesians*, 81.

185. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 749.

Paul appears to shift metaphors once more. Since he now uses the verb “rises” (literally, “grows”), which would normally apply to a living organism rather than to something static like a building, he is probably thinking of the church as the living body of Christ.

The verb *auxanei* ([grow] 2:21; compare 4:16) expressing an organic process, seems to be decidedly less suitable in referring to a building than in referring to the image of the body. The usage here, however, is Semitic in origin; in the OT the (Hebrew) verb means both to build an actual physical house as well as to increase or “build” a clan or dynasty or “house,” that is, the people of Israel. Thus, according to this idiom, it is perfectly appropriate to speak of the Church as the “temple-house” of God, comprising the growing clan or people of the Lord.¹⁸⁶

Paul’s language, however, is still drawn from architecture. In Christ “the whole building is joined together.”¹⁸⁷ The verb rendered “joined together” is used again of the living union of the various parts of the body (4:16). The point Paul is making is that the church – standing on the foundation of the teaching of the apostles and prophets, and aligned to Jesus Christ, its cornerstone – is constantly growing. “As a building depends for its cohesion and its development on being tied securely to its cornerstone, so Christ the cornerstone is indispensable to the church’s unity and growth.”¹⁸⁸ The goal of the entire work of building is the perfecting of the holy temple in the Lord. “The idea of growth is not only quantitative (more stones are added), but qualitative as well (the stones become intimately joined together in a common life).”¹⁸⁹

Paul then underlines an important spiritual truth: God makes his dwelling place not in any tangible structure but in the midst of his people (2:22). The church is intended to be the location of God’s presence in the world.¹⁹⁰

186. Metzger, “Paul’s Vision,” 58.

187. Mitton holds that the rendering “the whole building” is grammatically incorrect and that it ought to read “every structure.” Metaphorically, it must mean every separate local congregation within the universal Church, and which is nevertheless an integral part of the one Church. Mitton, *Ephesians*, 115; see also Beare, “Ephesians,” 662. But Moule cites several exceptions to the rule within the NT. Moule, *Idiom Book*, 95. In other words, Mitton may be right in saying that, grammatically speaking, the phrase ought to be rendered every structure. But this may well be one more exception to the rule, for the context appears to favor the rendering “the whole structure.” See also Westcott, *Ephesians*, 41.

188. Stott, *Message*, 108.

189. Metzger, “Paul’s Vision,” 59.

190. Perkins, “Ephesians,” 402, citing Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 684–685; Dunn says: “In 2:18 and 22 the Spirit is the medium of access to the very presence of God, the mortar

The words “you too” reemphasize that Gentiles share fully in the privilege of becoming “a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” The reference to the Spirit reminds Paul’s readers that “the separate parts of the edifice would never become a united whole without the ministry of the Spirit.”¹⁹¹

The church in Asian countries must give heed to this reminder that God’s people are the dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. Asians still persist with the sacred-secular distinction, particularly in relation to places, buildings, and professions. The general view is that a church building is the only place where we can worship God. Paul’s emphasis on the people rather than a building must dispel such views. God dwells wherever his people dwell. This distinction, found in the OT, is further reiterated by Christ (John 4:21–24). Elsewhere in the NT, too, the point is made that it is wrong to hold that God’s presence and blessing are confined to certain sacred places and buildings. In his defense before his accusers, Stephen thundered, “The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands” (Acts 7:48); Paul made the same point, using almost identical words, at Athens (Acts 17:24).

Ephesians 2:21–22 emphasizes that God dwells among his people and does not need buildings or structures specially consecrated by human beings for him to bless us with his presence. In the light of this teaching, much of the church’s traditional thinking about sacred places of worship and vocations must be brought under the judgment of Scripture and revised accordingly.

But the relevance of the passage stretches far beyond place of worship or divisions of caste and class. Marcus Barth says,

This verse [2:14] says that Jesus Christ has nothing to do with whatever divisions exist between races and nations, between science and morals, natural and legislated laws, primitive and progressive peoples, outsiders and insiders. The witness of Ephesians to Christ is that Christ has broken down every division and frontier between men. And even more, Ephesians adds that Christ has reconciled men with God!¹⁹²

Barth draws out the implications of this for various areas, one of which is the task of the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

Even if the claim – to have Christ on [our] side or for [ourselves] alone – were made by Christians, who with missionary

which bonds them as the bricks of the new temple of God.” Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 425.

191. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 749.

192. Barth, *Broken Wall*, 43.

zeal feel committed to bring Christ or Christianity to outsiders, non-Christians, or apostates, it would still be wrong, for Christians bear witness to Christ only when their words and deeds make it plain that Christ is as much the outsider's and opponent's Christ as their own. He is the end of division and enmity. He is not what a Christian can give to others. He is the gift of God to both.¹⁹³

This has practical implications. It means that Christians cannot be content with pious statements about the unity of the church but must make every effort to demonstrate this unity across the various lines that threaten it. Some ways of doing this would be to participate in common community projects and promote or support social causes that reflect common values grounded in Scripture. This also applies to working with people of other faiths. There is much that can be done alongside adherents of other faiths if only there is the will to find common ground, causes, and projects that reflect common values and concerns.

193. Barth, 44–45.

THE INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM

India is often singled out for its discriminatory caste system. But hierarchical distinctions – based on wealth, skin color, race, or religion – are significant dimensions of social stratification in most countries of the world. While birth is sometimes the dividing factor, wealth is often the most powerful discriminatory factor.

Caste, a social system of gradation, was given religious sanction by the ancient sacred writings of Hinduism and the *Rig Veda* – the earliest document of Indian history, believed to have been composed between 1500 and 1000 BC. The *Rig Veda* records that *Brahmins* or priests came from the face of the creator, *Kshatriyas* or warriors from his arms, *Vaisyas* or businessmen from his thighs, and *Sudras* or menial workers from the soles of his feet. In Indian society, members of the lowest caste were subjected to much humiliation.

The *Sudras* continued to be degraded, and even dehumanized, by the *Brahmins*. Revolts against the high castes by religious leaders such as Mahavira (540–468 BC), founder of Jainism, and Gautama Buddha (563–483 BC), founder of Buddhism, failed to have any significant impact on this rigid caste system. Both before and after India gained independence from British rule, the government passed many important laws – the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Caste Disabilities Removal Act, 1850, and the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856 – designed to uplift the lower castes. But this did not resolve the issue of caste discrimination. Although the constitution of India, adopted on November 26, 1949, guarantees the right of all citizens to justice, liberty, equality, and dignity, the reality does not reflect this.

The *Brahmins* dominate some segments of society and continue to assert their superiority. In theory, *Brahmins* are not permitted even to touch, or be touched by, someone of the lower castes for fear of defilement. Prescribed distances must be maintained to avoid being polluted by the *Sudras*. The stratification of Hindu society distanced the *Brahmins* from the people of lower economic status, creating a large mass of untouchables.

Although Mahatma Gandhi tried very hard to bring dignity to the untouchables – even designating them *Harjan* (meaning "god's people") – he was not able to do much for this huge mass of humanity – between 150 and 250 million people. Their cause was also championed by B. R. Ambedkar, one of the architects of the Indian constitution. Today, the *Sudras* prefer to be called the *Dalits* (meaning "oppressed"). The *Dalits* are fighting for equal status in Indian society. Disillusioned by Hinduism,

they want to break the stranglehold of the caste system – and some are even converting to Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity.

Christians and Muslims have sometimes viewed this situation as an opportunity to add millions to their own faith communities. But this is a sociopolitical and economic phenomenon, which must not be viewed merely as an evangelistic opportunity. True Christian compassion involves identifying with the *Dalits* in their present plight without making this conditional in any way upon conversion. As true Christlike compassion is demonstrated, individuals, families, and groups may want to enter the church. As Christians, our goal must be real transformation – not merely a conversion of social and religious identity.