

“Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” *which is performed in the flesh by human hands-- remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;* for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:11-22, NAS95.

#### God's Church: Its Doctrinal Foundation (the Indicative) - 1:1-3:21

In 2:1-10 Paul explained the meaning and spiritual mechanics of salvation in relation to the individual, whether Jew or Gentile. Death in sin is common to all, irrespective of ethnic origin (2:1-3). Likewise, none is saved but by the grace of God in Christ (2:4-10). This salvation of the individual, however, also has social and corporate implications. The redemptive work of Christ has forever abolished the inequalities that once existed between Jew and Gentile. The latter, at one time both physically and spiritually far away from the blessings of God, have now been brought near. Christ has abolished the barrier that not only separated God from Gentile but also Jew from Gentile. Through the blood of Christ the believing Gentile has been incorporated as a fellow-citizen into the household of God, receiving equal status with the believing Jew, the two together forming one new man in Christ, the Church. In describing this great event, Paul first portrays the condition of the Gentiles before the cross (2:11-12). He then explains what Christ has done to reverse their lost condition (2:13-18), and finally he describes what we, as believing Gentiles, in conjunction with believing Jews, have become: the Church of Jesus Christ, a holy temple in the Lord (2:19-22).

It would also appear that 2:11-22 sheds light on the meaning of God's eternal

purpose to sum up all things in Christ as stated in 1:10. "Two obstacles need to be overcome before the divine purposes would reach their fulfillment the subjection of the powers (representing 'the things in heaven'), and the church, particularly the relationship of Jews and Gentiles (representing 'the things on earth')" (O'Brien, 183).

#### A. Gentiles before Jesus 2:11-12

##### 1. uncircumcised 2:11

The label "uncircumcised," used by Jews of Gentiles, was one of derision and scorn. Yet, referring to Jewish circumcision as so-called may be Paul's way of pointing to the worthlessness of the physical rite as a guarantee of acceptance with God (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 1 Cor. 7:19; Phil. 3:3; Gal. 5:6 ['for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love]).

The word translated "by human hands" (*cheiropoietos*) and its opposite are used in the NT to contrast what is made by humans with what is made by God. It also points to the contrast between the external material aspects of the old order of Judaism under the Mosaic covenant and the internal spiritual efficacy of the new order under the New covenant (Mk. 14:58; Acts 7:48; 17:24; Heb. 9:11,24). Thus, to speak of something 'not made by human hands (*acheiropoietos*) is to assert that God himself has created it (e.g., the temple that Jesus would build in three days in Mk. 14:58; the heavenly house [i.e., body] which believers receive at death in 2 Cor. 5:1; and that true, spiritual circumcision of the heart which comes through the death of Christ in Col. 2:11). Paul's point is that the circumcision performed in the flesh with human hands is no longer the real or spiritually meaningful circumcision.

##### 2. unprivileged 2:12

###### a. separate from Christ

The word translated 'separate' is used in only two other places (Eph. 4:18; Col. 1:21) and means alienation or estrangement from God. But now they are "in Christ!" The question is raised: How can it be that having been separate from Christ is parallel to

having been separated from Israel? It would appear that Paul 'can make this point because he conceives of Christ as the Messiah belonging to Israel [or, as Best says, "the Messiah for whom Israel hoped" (241)]. His thought here, and later in this verse, appears to be dependent on Rom. 9:4,5, where Paul could say "and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ" (Lincoln, 137).

b. excluded from the commonwealth of Israel

The word translated "commonwealth" has the idea not only of a state or government but even more so of the rights extending to its citizens, i.e., privileges, blessings, resources, duties, etc. During that age God had restricted his elective purposes to Israel, but now, with the coming and cross of Christ, they are "fellow-citizens" (v. 19).

c. strangers to the covenants of promise

The plural "covenants" points to a series of covenants: with Abraham (Gen. 15; 17), Isaac (Gen. 26:2-5), Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15), and David (2 Sam. 7). These covenants were all characterized by or based on "promise," i.e., God's pledge to be faithful to his people and to fulfill his word to them. One might even translate the phrase, 'the covenants which embodied the promise of God. Though Gentiles had no formal part in this promise, they are part of Abraham's four seeds as the part of the spiritual seed of Abraham once Christ has made it possible for them to be His co-heirs. And then again as part of the special national seed of Abraham, the Church made up of Jew and Gentile as one new person. See esp. Gal. 3:16,29.

d. having no hope

e. without God in the world

The word *atheoi* can have several meanings: (1) not believing in God; (2) godless, in the ethical sense; (3) forsaken by God himself.

In sum: they were "Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless" (Hendriksen, 129).

B. The barrier abolished 2:13-18

1. what Christ has done vv. 13-14

a. He has brought us near by his blood - v. 13

"Now" contrasts with "at that time" of v. 12. 'In Christ contrasts with "apart from Christ" of v. 12. "Near" and "far" have both a geographical or spatial as well as spiritual meaning. See Deut. 4:7; Ps. 148:14; Dan. 9:7; Acts 2:39; 22:21. The spatial distance of the Gentiles was symbolic of their spiritual and moral separation as well (see Deut. 28:49; 29:22; 1 Kings 8:41; Isa. 5:26; Jer. 5:15).

b. He has made both Jew and Gentile into one v. 14a

Paul's emphasis on peace is unmistakable: he uses the term 4x in vv. 14,15,17 (twice), as well as related concepts of reconciliation (v. 16), making the two into one (v. 14), creating one new humanity (v. 15), etc. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in Eph. 6:15 Paul will refer to the message of Christianity as being 'the gospel of peace. That peace should now exist between the two is remarkable, given the fact that

"the Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made . . . It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death" (William Barclay, 125).

Observe that Jesus doesn't merely create peace, he is peace!

c. He has broken down the barrier wall, i.e., the enmity v. 14b

This double alienation of the Gentile, from God and from the Jew, was symbolized by the "middle wall of partition" (v. 14; KJV) or the "dividing wall of hostility" (RSV) or "the barrier of the dividing wall" (NASB). Translation options: (1) "dividing wall that has the character of a barrier" (genitive of quality); (2) "the dividing wall made from a

barrier" (origin); (3) "dividing wall belonging to the barrier" (possessive); or (4) "the dividing wall which is a barrier" (apposition). The latter is most likely. There are three possible interpretations of this phrase.

(1) "Some argue that this refers literally to the temple balustrade which separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts and the sanctuary. It was a notable feature of Herod's temple in Jerusalem. The temple itself was on an elevated platform. Around it was the Court of the Priests. To the east was the Court of Israel, and further east was the Court of the Women. 'These three courts for the priests, the lay men and the lay women of Israel respectively were all on the same elevation as the temple itself. From this level one descended five steps to a walled platform, and then on the other side of the wall fourteen more steps to another wall, beyond which was the outer court or Court of the Gentiles. This was a spacious court running right round the temple and its inner courts. From any part of it the Gentiles could look up and view the temple, but were not allowed to approach it. They were cut off from it by the surrounding wall which was a one-and-a-half metre stone barricade, on which were displayed at intervals warning notices in Greek and Latin. They read, in effect, not 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' but 'Trespassers will be executed,' (Stott, 91-92).

Josephus describes this barricade in his Antiquities. He writes that the temple was "encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death" (XV, 11.5). The partition was "made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits. Its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars at equal distance from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek and some in Roman letters, that 'no foreigner should go within that sanctuary" (Wars of the Jews, V.5.2).

Two of the Greek signs have been discovered, one in 1871 and the other in 1935. The former, now housed in a museum in Istanbul, Turkey, is a white limestone slab approximately one meter across. It reads: "No foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to

"This, then, is the historical, social and religious background to Ephesians 2. Although all human beings are alienated from God because of sin, the Gentiles were also alienated from the people of God. And worse even than this double alienation (of which the temple wall was a symbol) was the active 'enmity' or 'hostility' (echthra) into which it continuously erupted enmity between man and God, and enmity between Gentiles and Jews. The grand theme of Ephesians 2 is that Jesus Christ has destroyed both enmities" (92).

The principal objection to this view is that Paul's Gentile readers living in Asia Minor would have no knowledge of such a barrier. It makes little sense for him to base his argument on a concept that few if any of his readers would have had opportunity to see or understand. Best also points out that nowhere else is this wall termed a "dividing wall" (mesotoichon).

(2) The second view is that the barrier Paul mentions is the Mosaic Law itself which functioned to protect Israel from Gentile impurity. The first phrase of v. 15 thus parallels the last phrase of v. 14. Therefore, "having broken down the dividing wall, the fence" (v. 14) = "having abolished the enmity, the Law of commandments" (v. 15). According to this view, the Mosaic Law was a sign of Jewish particularism and created a fence around Israel thereby separating Jews from Gentiles both religiously and socially. This contributed to the deep-seated hostility between the two groups. "The laws which forbade eating or intermarrying with Gentiles often led Jews to have a contempt for Gentiles which could regard . . . [them] as less than human. In response, Gentiles would often regard Jews with great suspicion, considering them inhospitable and hateful to non-Jews, and indulge in anti-Jewish prejudice" (Lincoln, 142).

(3) Ernest Best argues that it may "simply be that we have an ordinary metaphor of a separating wall and are wrong to look for recondite [i.e., secret or hidden] meanings in it. It is not unnatural for people when they disagree, or when they see others disagreeing, to speak as if there was a separating factor ('I can't get

through to them; it's as if there was a wall between us'). The wall could then be regarded as purely metaphorical and not indicative of some theological idea" (256).

2. how he has done it v. 15a
  - a. by means of his flesh, i.e., the offering of himself upon the cross
  - b. he abolished the law of commandments in ordinances

The content of the Law = commandments, and the form of the commandments = ordinances. Thus the Mosaic covenant and its law no longer carry any authority for the believer. This is not to say that nothing in the Law/Covenant as it exists not as Covenant but as revelation is relevant today (see Eph. 6:1-3; Rom. 13:8-10). It is to say that the OT Scripture must be interpreted and applied Christologically, i.e., in view of what Christ has done in fulfilling the law and inaugurating a new covenant.

Paul will tolerate no practice of the Mosaic Law/Covenant that excludes Gentiles or forces them to become Jews

3. why Christ did it vv. 15b-16
  - a. in order to create one new man v. 15b

By "new man" he means the Christian community in its corporate identity, the Church. This new man is not simply an amalgam of the old in which the best of Judaism and the best of the Gentile world are combined. This is a completely new creation in which any distinctiveness of being Jewish or Gentile are irrelevant. Thus, as Lincoln says, "they have not just been brought into a mutual relationship, but have been made one in a unity where both are no longer what they previously were" (cf. vv. 15,16,18). In accomplishing this, Christ has transcended one of the fundamental divisions of the first-century world (140-41).

Therefore, it is not as though Gentiles are transformed into Jews or Jews into Gentiles. Rather "the resulting new humanity transcends the two old entities, even though unbelieving Israel and disobedient Gentiles continue to exist" (O'Brien, 184). For Paul, there are but three groups of people in the world: unbelieving Jews,

unbelieving Gentiles, and the Church (cf. 1 Cor. 10:32). See esp. Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28; 6:15. And in reality we can say those three groups comprise two humanities that are made known in the account of the Garden: the seed of the Serpent and the seed of the woman.

b. in order that he might reconcile both in one body to God v. 16

The one "body" is a reference to the church and denotes the same reality as the "one new man" in v. 15. It was "by the cross that this was achieved. Christ in his death was slain, but the slain was a slayer too" (Robinson, 65). The "enmity" which Christ has killed is both vertical (between God and humanity) and horizontal (between Jew and Gentile).

Observe that "both," i.e. Jew no less than Gentile, have been reconciled to God through the cross. If one should ask how Jews are now said to be reconciled to God, Paul would respond that the law which separated Gentiles from Israel, and from Israel's God, also separated Israel from God due to her failure to obey (see Gal. 3:10-22; Rom. 3:19-20; 9:30-10:4). Note also that this "reconciliation" of Jew to God and Gentile to God is not in isolation from the other, but "in one body," i.e., in their new identity as the Church, the new "third race," if you will.

4. the message he proclaimed vv. 17-18

a. its content: peace v. 17

Those "far away" = Gentiles and those "near" = Jews. But when did Christ "come" and "preach this gospel of peace?" Several different interpretations:

- \* A pre-incarnate preaching by the Son of God?
- \* The incarnation
- \* The earthly ministry of Jesus as a whole
- \* The cross: his death proclaimed peace. However, whereas it is certainly true that by his death he "procured peace," can it rightly be said that the cross "proclaimed peace?"



- \* The resurrection
- \* His post-resurrection appearances (John 14:27 "Peace be with you").
- \* His proclamation of peace through the apostles and the early church by means of the Spirit

The OT text Paul quotes here is Isa. 57:19 which in its original context spoke of God's blessing on Jews in the land ("to those who were near") and Jews of the dispersion ("far away"). Paul appears to believe the ultimate fulfillment is found in peace being proclaimed to Gentiles!

b. its result: access v. 18

For the word "access" see Eph. 3:12; Rom. 5:1,2. Whereas some have argued the reference is to an oriental court scene in which a person is granted an audience with a king or emperor, Paul's imagery most likely derives from the OT sacrificial system in which offerings were brought into the presence of God (Lev. 1:3; 3:3; 4:14). But notice the emphasis: "we both have our access" . . . As O'Brien points out, "it is not simply that individual Gentiles and Jews have unhindered entry into the presence of God, wonderful as this is. In addition, both of them as one new humanity/people can come into his presence. 'Jew and Gentile stand together as one people in God's presence with old distinctions no longer having significance'" (209).

Notice two additional features of our access:

- \* It is "in the S/spirit." Is this a) the Holy Spirit; b) the human spirit; or c) the human spirit under the influence and anointing of the Holy Spirit? Probably a). Says Fee: "For Paul it is the common experience of the one Spirit, by Jew and Gentile alike, that attests that God has created something new in the body of Christ (cf. v. 15). Thus, the one Spirit who has formed them into the one body, also brings them together as that one body into the presence of the Father. It is as they live together in the common sphere of the Spirit that they have entrance with God" (God's Empowering Presence, 684).

\* It is to the "Father" and not simply to "God!"

C. Gentiles after Jesus 2:19-22

1. we are now fellow-citizens v. 19a

If there is a distinction between the terms "strangers" and "aliens" it would be that the former describes a person from another country while the latter points to the stranger who lives in the land as a resident alien. The good news, however, is that believing Gentiles are now neither homeless nor second-class citizens in someone else's kingdom or homeland: they are fellow-citizens with the saints! See Phil. 3:20. But who are the "saints" with whom believing Gentiles now share this glorious privilege?

\* OT Jews (i.e., the patriarchs and other famous OT figures)?

\* NT Jewish believers?

\* Gentile believers?

\* All believers, both Jewish and Gentile?

2. we are now of God's household v. 19b

The imagery now shifts from the political realm of citizenry and its rights to the intimacy of a family and home. It is not simply that Jews and Gentiles are fellow-citizens under God's rule: they are now children together, brothers and sisters, in God's family.

As the text stands, the Gentiles' former disadvantages have been reversed, not by their being incorporated into Israel, although we are grafted in, or even into a renewed Israel of Jewish Christians, the first fulfillment of Jer. 31:2: goes beyond the categories of Jew and Gentile, an entity which is a new creation, not simply a merging of the former groupings. . . . Gentiles no longer lack a commonwealth. Yet this is not because they are now part of the commonwealth of Israel, but because they are fellow citizens with all the saints, Jews and Gentiles in the Church. Eph. 2 depicts the Church in terms of a new third entity, one which transcends the old ethnic and religious entities of Jew and Gentile.

### 3. we are now the temple of the Lord vv. 20-22

In 1 Cor. 3:9-17 Paul spoke of building on a foundation and of a temple indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In that passage Paul himself and other apostolic leaders are portrayed as laying the foundation, which is Christ himself, on whom/which they continue to build. But here the foundation consists of the apostles and prophets themselves and Jesus is the cornerstone. We should not be surprised or bothered by this, for it is common in the NT for biblical authors to modify their metaphors and apply them in differing (but never contradictory) ways.

#### a. its foundation and cornerstone v. 20

The "apostles and prophets" are the foundation of the church in that their inspired and revelatory teaching concerning the person and work of Christ provided the theological bedrock on which all subsequent ministry and spiritual growth occurs. They were "the primary and authoritative recipients and proclaimers of revelation" (Lincoln, 153). See below for further discussion.

The word translated "cornerstone" is somewhat ambiguous:

\* Some argue that it should be rendered 'capstone' and that it refers to the crowning stone at the top of the edifice, not the bottom.

\* In view of the usage of this word in Isa. 28:16 (the only text in the LXX where it is found), Paul most likely means that "Christ is the vital cornerstone on whom the building is constructed. The foundation and position of all the other stones in the superstructure were determined by him. He is 'the one from which the rest of the foundation is built outwards along the line of the proposed walls'. Accordingly, the temple is built out and up from the revelation given in Christ, with the apostles and prophets elaborating and explaining the mystery, which has been made known to them by the Holy Spirit (3:4-11, esp. v. 5). 'But all is built on Christ, supported by Christ, and the lie or shape of the continuing building is determined by Christ, the cornerstone" (O'Brien, 217-18).

b. its formation v. 21

Notice the "in whom" phrase with which both v. 21 and v. 22 open. The point is that this building, this "temple" functions only in relation to Jesus Christ. This formation of the temple is an on-going divine project, a continuous process (see also Eph. 4:15-16). Although it may seem strange to speak of a "building" experiencing continuous "growth," Paul surely wants us to conceive of the church as an organic entity. Peter also refers to believers as "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5)!

c. its function v. 22

The word translated "dwelling" (*katoiketerion*) is used in the OT of God's dwelling in the temple at Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:13) and of his heavenly dwelling place (1 Kings 8:39,43). "Now his dwelling place can be said to be neither a literal temple in Jerusalem nor simply heaven, but the Church, of which the Gentile Christian readers in Asia Minor were a part" (Lincoln, 158). What theological and practical (indeed, political) significance is there in the fact that Paul says the individual Christian and the church corporately are the "temple of God?" See 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; 1 Peter 2:4-10; see also John 1:14; 2:19-22; Acts 7:48-50.

It should be clear that all distinctions, all spiritual privileges, all grounds for separation and alienation based on one's ancestry have been abolished by the blood of the cross. One's ethnic history no longer has bearing or weight or significance in the sight of God. One's ethnic identity no longer has relevance when it comes to the experience of spiritual privilege. The display of God's glory to the world will not ever be an ethnically united people-group who share a common ancestry, but will always be the spiritually united church, Christ bride His one new people made up of many kinds of people who share a common faith.