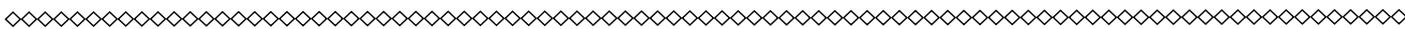




Pastor of the
International
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many.

Sermon Brief
Text: Eph. 2:11-22
Title: No Longer Outsiders
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Belonging. This is an important human connection. Emotionally healthy people need a sense of belonging to a group of people beyond themselves. Different cultures define ‘belonging’ differently, as well as place differing levels of importance on it. In the world of west Texas ranch life that I grew up in rugged individualism was the dominant cultural social value. The folks that lived on ranches often lived several kilometers from their nearest neighbor, and would have only occasional contact with them. Thus the need for belonging was relatively unimportant. A few weeks ago I watched a TV documentary on German television about ranch life in the Australian outback where the ranching family was over three hundred kilometers from their nearest neighbors. As the reporter interviewed the young son in his early teen years, he was asked if he missed having friends close by that he could play with. His answer was quick and firm. “No,” he declared, “I could never live in a city with so many people so close by me.” It reminded me of the same viewpoint that I grew up with in the 1950s in Texas.

Most people, however, look at social connections to other people very differently from this rather extreme view. Urban Americans, in general, value social connections more than the people who live in rural America, especially in ranch life. Many of you come from parts of the world where a collective or communal approach to society prevails over individualism. In that cultural atmosphere, social connections are critical. One does not have identity outside a group of some sort. The family or clan is central to this identify. But participation in other social groups play a very important role as well. Isolation from the group has huge negative implications for the individual. The sense of belonging in a collectivistic society is very important to self-worth and self-identity.

The ancient Greco-Roman world was primarily collectivistic oriented. The idealized model of a collectivistic society under central governmental control was first set forth by the Greek philosophy Plato in his work *The Republic* in the fourth century before Christ. In his thinking, society becomes orderly and stable only when everyone both understands and follows his ‘stasis,’ his pre-determined station, in society. One’s worth and self-identity are determined by this stasis, which defines his relationship to society. Out of this came the idea of the Greek city, the polis (πόλις). Holding citizenship (πολιτεία) in the city was critical to being valued and possessing significant worth as in individual. Thus the Greeks divided up all humanity into two groups of the people: we educated Greeks and you ignorant barbarians.¹ By Jesus’ time, the Romans had modified this to focus on citizenship in Rome as the most important connection socially. To hold Roman citizenship opened all kinds of opportunities in that world. In the Jewish heritage, the collective orientation in society had another foundation: the Law of God and the Covenant. Social status and value were measured in proportion to whether one was an observant Jew with proper circumcision and adequate obedience to the laws of God. In that world all humanity was divided into two groups: we Jews who are in relationship with God and you Gentiles who are under God’s wrath. For Jews in the first century particularly, belonging to the covenant of Israel meant everything both socially and religiously. Not belonging was to experience the ultimate of worthless and uselessness as an individual.

It is against this backdrop of Jew / Gentile divisions of society that Paul made the astounding declaration in Eph. 2:11-22 on how God in Christ has eliminated this separating barrier of Jew / Gentile in Christ Jesus. Hear his words carefully:

11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision” — a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands — 12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to

¹See Rom. 1:14 where Paul plays off this social division universal in his world: “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.”

those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.²

In ancient Judaism, the feeling that Jewish people were the chosen people of God and alone had access to the God of this universe was very intense and widespread. Every other person stood outside this special circle and could only partially enter it by extensive procedures, mainly focusing on being circumcised and committing oneself to rigorously observe the Torah of God as interpreted by the scribes. Apart from being inside the covenant a person was of little worth and value. Extensive and very rigid rules of conduct separated covenant Jews from contact and dealings with non-Jews as much as humanly possible. Particularly in Judea in southern Palestine with Jerusalem and the temple, this separation was very strong. Most Jews craved for a day when their long awaited Messiah would appear to purge the Land of Promise from any and all non-Jewish elements. Then covenant Jews would be able to live completely free from possible 'contamination' through contact with Gentiles. For them the Messiah would forever rid the Jewish people of any need for contact with Gentiles in the Promise Land.

Paul's message in Ephesians is just the opposite of this. As Christianity with its Jewish beginnings in the 30s and 40s of the first Christian century extended itself to include growing numbers of non-Jews in its membership, tensions often flashed up inside the churches about the role of Gentiles in a Christian church. Through the 50s of the first century this controversy erupted in several places, like the churches in Galatia, in Corinth, in Rome and a few other spots. It exploded in Antioch in the late 40s and Acts 15 describes this problem in detail. It took a special appearance to the apostle Peter -- described in Acts 10 -- for him to come around to the different, positive viewpoint about Gentiles. As Paul writes the Ephesian letter in the late 50s, he still feels a strong need for instructing the Christian churches in the province of Asia on this matter of the dismantling of Jewish / Gentile barriers through Christ.

The challenge of this passage to our church is substantial. The multi-cultural nature of our congregation creates particular needs that many churches don't face. We have many different heritages represented in our group, often with each having certain ways to doing things which differ from one another. Most of us are immigrants to Germany, and that means we are 'outsiders' in many aspects. At times the sense of not belonging is a powerful tug. The natural reaction to this is isolation. We feel the desire to pull into our own little world that is comfortable and safe -- and familiar. Crossing cultural barriers and reaching out to people who are different is a real challenge. The ministry of the apostle Paul to the Gentile world of his day posed horrific challenges to Paul himself with his background in an extremely rigid and prejudicial mind-set against Gentiles. Growing up in the Gentile world of Tarsus had helped him, but only in the grace of God through Christ was the apostle able to reach out to non-Jews in acceptance and sincere ministry. The rapid expansion of Christianity into the non-Jewish world of the middle first century posed all kinds of challenges for not only Paul but the entire Christian movement itself.

In our text Paul presents the heart of the matter for Christian unity and cross-cultural community inside the church. We need to hear that word. God has blessed our church greatly in part because of our commitment to bridge these social and cultural barriers in the name of Christ and for the cause of Christian unity. So this passage has something of particular importance for us today.

²GNT 2.11 Διὸ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ποτὲ ὑμεῖς τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί, οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀκροβυστία ὑπὸ τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς ἐν σαρκὶ χειροποιήτου, 2.12 ὅτι ἦτε τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ χωρὶς Χριστοῦ, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες καὶ ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. 2.13 νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἱ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγεινήθητε ἐγγὺς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

2.14 Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἐν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ, 2.15 τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην 2.16 καὶ ἀποκαταλλάξῃ τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἀποκτείνας τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν αὐτῷ. 2.17 καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσατο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην τοῖς ἐγγύς· 2.18 ὅτι δι' αὐτοῦ ἔχομεν τὴν προσαγωγήν οἱ ἀμφοτέροι ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. 2.19 ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, 2.20 ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 2.21 ἐν ᾧ πάσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὖξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, 2.22 ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι.

BODY

I. The difference of 'now' over 'then,' vv. 11-13

11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision” — a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands — 12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

2.11 Διὸ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ποτὲ ὑμεῖς τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί, οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀκροβυστία ὑπὸ τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς ἐν σαρκὶ χειροποιήτου, 2.12 ὅτι ἦτε τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ χωρὶς Χριστοῦ, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες καὶ ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. 2.13 νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἳ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγενήθητε ἐγγὺς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

The primary focus of the two Greek sentences in these verses is on a reminder of who the Ephesian readers were before Christ (vv. 11-12) and now who they are in Christ (v. 13).

We have here a continuation of the BC / AD perspective on Christian conversion that first surfaced in 2:1-10 and provided a major organizing structure for Paul's thoughts there. ³In that discussion Paul lined up the contrast of life before Christ and life after conversion in the following manner. It is instructive to see the list there and then to compare it with what he says here.

The Before Christ (BC) era was centered on spiritual death. Paul affirmed we **were** dead, not will be dead. That meant living according to the dictates of this world, under the control of Satan, and following our fleshly passions. Both non-Christian Jew and Gentile were living a life that made them deserving objects of God's wrath.

The AD (after Christ) era, Paul declares, centers on having been made alive in Christ. This means spiritual resurrection out of the previous spiritual death and being seated in “heavenly places” with Christ. That is, we are alive with God and have access to His presence. All this is a work of God's grace intended for our good works that bring praise of our Heavenly Father.

This declaration in 2:1-10 sets the stage for a continued contrast between the then and now in vv. 11-13, but with a different focus. The spiritual reality is the same, but the images that Paul uses are different.

What was his readers' BC life? He calls upon them to remember what this period was like. This era before Christian conversion is described by two ὅτι-clauses playing off the imperative verb μνημονεύετε. This admonition is couched in a present imperative Greek command form of the verb. The implication of this is to call for a continual awareness of the past, rather than for a one time reminder. Clearly Paul felt that his Ephesian readers should never forget where they had come from spiritually. The past is an important part of appreciating the depths of what God had done for us in Christ when He liberated us from that past.

One side note: there's a difference between remembering and celebrating. I've heard many “testimonies” about conversion -- especially from preachers -- who took delight in depicting their sinful, rebellious non-Christian life before conversion. With a few that I have listened to over these sixty plus years now, I came away with the impression that they had a little sadnesses in giving up at least some aspects of their sinful past in order to become a Christian. That's not what Paul had in mind here in any stretch of the imagination! Only shame and guilt about our life and living before Christ should be present in our recollection of that life. To glory in it sends clear signals of a failure to have genuinely repented of that life in coming to Christ.

Paul's depiction of the BC era in verses 11-12 is twofold and is introduced by a couple of “that” (=ὅτι) clauses standing as the direct object of the imperative verb to remember.

First: “that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’ — a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands —” (ὅτι ποτὲ ὑμεῖς τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί, οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀκροβυστία ὑπὸ τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς ἐν σαρκὶ χειροποιήτου). He begins with a reminder of their ethnic origin as Gentiles, or non-Jews. Paul here anticipates that his initial targeted readership in this circular letter for Ephesus and beyond was going to be read to predominately non-Jewish Christian communities. By birth (lit. in the flesh, ἐν σαρκί) his readers were τὰ ἔθνη (Gentiles). The pejorative nature of this term from a Jewish view was blatant.⁴

³For a detailed discussion of this see, the [Bible study](#) “Before / After” on Eph. 2:1-10 at cranfordville.com.

⁴Alfred Edersheim in his classic writing [The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah](#) notes this about Jewish attitudes toward others in the first century world:

And then, as the proud Roman passed on the Sabbath through the streets, Judaism would obtrude itself upon his notice, by the shops that were shut, and by the strange figures that idly moved about in holiday attire. They were strangers in a strange land, not only without sympathy with what passed around, but with marked contempt and abhorrence of it, while there was that about their whole bearing, which expressed the unspoken feeling, that the time

Paul's readers were Gentiles. That was roughly equivalent to being called "white trash" in our world. But Paul reminds them of another label tacked on by the Jews of their day: "uncircumcised" (ἀκροβυστία). Only a very few Semitic cultures in the ancient world practiced circumcision of their males. For the Jewish people circumcision took on profound religious significance based on the linking of God's covenant with Abraham to being circumcised (cf. [Genesis 17:9-14](#)). Particularly important was Gen. 17:13-14:

13 Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

But Paul's attitude toward the spiritual significance of circumcision here is very different. He considers it merely as a physical action (ἐν σαρκὶ χειροποιήτου) that has been given false religious significance (ὑπὸ τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς).

Earlier in both Romans (4:1-12) and also to some degree in Galatians (3:15-18), he had persuasively argued that God had declared Abraham righteous based on Abraham's faith commitment (Gen. 15:1-6) decades before He insisted that Abraham be circumcised (Gen. 17:9-14). Thus circumcision as having the power to bring one into the Covenant with God that was the basis of salvation -- as taught by the scribal Jews of Paul's day -- was completely false and was based on twisted interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Thus for Gentiles to be called "Uncircumcised" by circumcised Jews was about the modern equivalent of saying "worthless pagans."

What's the value in being reminded of a day when prejudicial labels defined you as outcasts and worthless? Both ethnically and spiritually! Paul evidently saw here the utterly black canvass that God would use to paint his picture of the Gentile believer in Christ with the most vibrant, brilliant colors imaginable. Against such a dark, foreboding backdrop the grace of God would shine as bright as the noon-day sun.

He also signals in this first segment the shallow, superficial nature of the labels "Gentile" and "uncircumcised." This was the false Jewish assessment of non-Jews. But it focused on one outward physical characteristic: circumcision. And even that was questionable because of the false religious value to circumcision that the Jews had given to it.

Against such it would be easy to dismiss any religious assessment coming from people connected to the Jews, as were the early Christian leaders who were themselves Jewish. And certainly most of first century Roman society looked with even greater contempt on the Jewish people of that world, than the contempt Jews typically held toward Gentiles.

Second: "that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (ὅτι ἦτε τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ χωρὶς Χριστοῦ, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες καὶ ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ).

For Gentiles to dismiss the Jewish assessment of them would be to overlook some authentic spiritual realities that were present in their pre-Christian existence. In the second "that"-clause in verse 12, Paul lists several authentic aspects of his readers pre-Christian life (τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ).

1. They were "without Christ" (χωρὶς Χριστοῦ). Most importantly these people were cut off from Christ who is the exclusive means to salvation and relationship with God. To be missing relationship with Christ meant the loss of everything spiritually. That's as true today as it was then. Additionally, this phrase in this context has the further tones that non-Jews in their pre-Christian state were without a Messiah. They possessed no anticipation of a divinely commissioned Deliverer who would rescue them from their spiritual death.

2. They were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ). This very Jewish oriented phrase underscores the legitimate role of Covenant Jews in that time. The Israelite people were God's chosen people. To be a part of that covenantal people was to be under God's blessings. Jews did enjoy certain advantages before God as Paul had earlier written about to the Romans (cf. Rom. 9:4-5):

4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; 5 to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

The Jewish people enjoyed a wonderful religious heritage. And that was something Paul's Gentile readers didn't possess. And because of that they suffered serious deficiencies in their religious life. Jesus had alluded to this in his conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4:22, "You worship what you do not know; we [Jews] worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews."

of Rome's fall, and of their own supremacy, was at hand.

To put the general feeling in the words of Tacitus, the Jews kept close together, and were ever most liberal to one another; but they were filled with bitter hatred of all others. They would neither eat nor sleep with strangers; and the first thing which they taught their proselytes was to despise the gods, to renounce their own country, and to rend the bonds which had bound them to parents, children or kindred...

3. They were “strangers to the covenants of promise” (ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας). Most centrally in not being Jews, Paul’s Gentile readers were not a part of the covenants of promise. In God’s eternal plan of salvation (as its called in German *die Heilsgeschichte*), His blessings flow to humanity through covenants beginning with the one made with Abraham. That covenant was renewed several times during Abraham’s life and became the foundation for understanding the concept of eternal salvation. Paul’s Gentile readers in their pre-Christian existence were not participants in that blessing. Instead, they were “aliens” (ξένοι), non-citizens who possessed no right of participation.

4. They had no hope (ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες). These Gentile readers also did not possess hope in their pre-Christian life. What is meant here is that they did not possess any authentic spiritual hope for eternity. Christian hope is the expectation of eternal life lived in the full blessing of God and experienced unceasingly through the ages of eternity. In other words, it is Heaven. The Greek word for hope, ἐλπίς, possesses a level of expectancy of realization that its English counterpart often does not contain. To possess such anticipation with absolute certainty is to have one’s life defined and guided by a marvelous objective. This is the essence of Christian hope as set forth in the New Testament: we know that we’re Heaven bound and each day of life brings us a day closer to arriving at home. That brings excitement and anticipation in growing levels the closer to arrival we get.

5. They were “without God in the world” (ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ). Paul began by declaring that his Gentile readers didn’t possess Christ in the pre-Christian existence. He concludes by declaring that they didn’t possess God either. They were ἄθεοι (*atheoi*), atheists. Not that they didn’t believe in the existence of deities, for they accepted the existence of hundreds of gods and goddesses. The world of the first century was an overwhelmingly religiously focused culture -- far, far more than our American culture. They had many gods and goddesses, but they didn’t have God -- the only one who actually exists. Paul provides a new take on the idea of an atheist. He / she can be one who believes in the existence of deity, but does not have authentic relationship with the true God who alone exists. The issue is not our mental attitude about the existence of God; rather, it’s about our genuine relationship with that God.

Thus to the BC column begun in 2:1-4, Paul adds several more traits beyond being in spiritual death with all its implications.

In verse 13, he shifts to the AD column with a powerful declaration: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἳ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγένηθητε ἐγγύς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ). In Christ a great reversal has taken place. Here Paul shifts to a dramatic metaphor of spatial distance as the foundation of this depiction of Christian conversion. Before conversion (οἳ ποτε ὄντες...) his Gentile readers were μακρὰν (far off). With this dramatic image he alludes to all that he has just declared in verse 12 about the Gentiles in their pagan days. Those days meant they were a long ways away from God. He was distant to them, and they to Him. To be far away from God is to be separated from God.

But note the contrast between ‘then’ (ποτε) and ‘now’ (νυνὶ) present here. The now, νυνὶ, is an emphatic expression, rather than the more common temporal adverb for now, νῦν. It is not just ‘now’; rather, it is “NOW!” The coming of Christ into their lives has brought dramatic change and transformation. Central here to Paul’s expression is that the coming of Christ has brought them ‘near’ (ἐγγύς) to God. God is now reachable; He is accessible; He is Father.

What makes the difference? How do we move from “far away” to “near”? Paul’s answer here is twofold: ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“in Christ Jesus”) and ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“in/by the blood of Christ”). To come into spiritual union with Christ takes place through the blood of Christ. Christ and the cross are inseparably linked. And the cross means blood -- blood being poured out in sacrificial death. It’s grizzly; it’s horrible; it’s repugnant. But it’s essential and critical to our moving from “afar off” to “near.”

This is a [foundational teaching](#) of the New Testament. [1 Peter 1:18-19](#) sums up the link this way:

[18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.](#)

Christ’s shed blood is the key to our salvation.

The connection of all this to us today who are overwhelmingly Gentile Christians is obvious. Outside of Christ our spiritual condition is dismal and bleak. In truth, it is living in spiritual death. But in the blood of Christ we have come into spiritual union with Christ. And this means that we have been brought near to God whom we now have relationship with and access to. What a powerful declaration of scripture!

II. Christ, the Reconciler, vv. 14-18

[14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to](#)

those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

2.14 Αὐτὸς γάρ ἐστιν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἐν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ, 2.15 τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσει ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην 2.16 καὶ ἀποκαταλλάξῃ τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἀποκτείνας τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν αὐτῷ. 2.17 καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσατο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην τοῖς ἐγγύς· 2.18 ὅτι δι' αὐτοῦ ἔχομεν τὴν προσαγωγὴν οἱ ἀμφότεροι ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα.

This second segment presents several challenges for clear understanding. It clearly stands as a justification (γάρ) for what Paul has just said about the BC / AD condition of his Gentile readers. Obviously it is the center piece of the three fold passage division. But what of the background of this rather well crafted and somewhat poetical declaration about Christ?

Many NT scholars are inclined to see hymnic structure to these statements. But is there enough evidence to justify such claims?

The answer to this question depends in part on the connection of Eph. 2:14-18 to Col. 1:15-20, which is generally thought to be remnants of an early Christian hymn:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers — all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

This probable early Christian hymnic expression is often seen as the model for Eph. 2:14-18 and as a piece of pre-formed Christian tradition that is incorporated into Paul's letter. The surrounding context of Col. 1: 12-14 and 1:21-23 bears some resemblance thematically to Eph. 2:11-3 and 2:19-22. But enough differences exist to seriously question whether this similarity to Colossians points to a hymnic origin for 2:14-18. More likely they point to a common author treating generally related themes.

Another basis for the hymnic understanding is the perception of a chiasmic structure in 2:14-18 or an even larger chunk of the text. Various proposals exist but usually follow to some extent the one proposed by Thomas Yoder in the *Believer's Church Bible Commentary* (iPreach) incorporating the entire passage:

- A Once strangers and aliens without God (2:11–12)
- B Christ has brought near the far (2:13)
- C Christ is our peace (2:14–16)**
- B' Christ proclaimed peace to the far and the near (2:17–18)
- A' Now no longer strangers, but part of God's home (2:19–22)

Although initially appealing, this schema has numerous problems connected to it.⁵Some traditional material may well be incorporated, along with similar emphases found in Colossians. Additionally, the proposal of some more recent commentators that 2:14-18 assumes Paul's midrashic interpretation of Isa. 57:19⁶ and it

⁵As Andrew Lincoln (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems) points out:

Some of the indications that hymnic material could lie behind this section are the break with the surrounding context of the contrast schema, the “we” style that interrupts the “you” style of address to the readers in vv 11–13 and vv 19–22, the opening emphatic predication (“he is our peace”), the pointedly Christological content of the material, the heavy use of participles, the apparent *parallelismus membrorum*, the piling up of a number of *hapax legomena*, and awkward syntax which suggests interpretation. Such features, in the light of the analysis which follows, have made it seem more probable that we are dealing with hymnic material that has been reworked (cf. also Schlier, 122–23; Schille, *Frühchristliche Hymnen*, 24–31; J. T. Sanders, *ZNW* 56 [1965] 216–18; Fischer, *Tendenz*, 131–37; Gnlika, 147–52; idem, “Christus unser Friede,” 190–207; Barth, 261–62; Burger, *Schöpfung*, 117–33; Wengst, *Christologische Formeln*, 181–86; Lindemann, *Aufhebung*, 156–59; Martin, *Reconciliation*, 168–71) than with a straightforward argument (pace Mussner, *Christus*, 100–101; Merklein, *BZ* 17 [1973] 79–102; Ernst, 314–21; Schnackenburg, 106–7, 112).

But what is the extent of such hymnic material? Against those who would include v 17 or v 18 (cf. Schlier, 123; Schille, *Frühchristliche Hymnen*, 24–31; Gnlika, 147–52; idem, “Christus unser Friede,” 197–200; Barth, 276; Fisher *Tendenz*, 132; Burger, *Schöpfung*, 128–33), it must be said that the language and concepts of v 17 come from the OT passage Isa 57:19, clearly take up v 13, and are formulated as an address to the readers (cf. the introduction of the second person plural ὑμῖν), and that v 18 reads more like the writer's own summary of the significance of the preceding verses in language reminiscent of Rom 5:2. In addition, neither v 17 or v 18 easily provides reconstructed lines which would be of an appropriate length for the original hymnic material (cf. also Wengst, *Christologische Formeln*, 182–83). It is behind vv 14–16 that there may well be traditional material which spoke of Christ as the one who provides cosmic peace and reconciliation (cf. also J. T. Sanders, *ZNW* 56 [1965] 216–18; Wengst, *Christologische Formeln*, 181–86; Lindemann, *Aufhebung*, 156–59; Martin, *Reconciliation*, 172).

⁶Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord; and I will heal them. (NRSV)

has some possible merit, but is limited. In my opinion the existing structure of 2:14-18 should be attributed to the composition of Ephesians itself, rather than to some pre-existing document. But this does not exclude the borrowing of short phrases etc. from such material.

The present syntactical structure of the Greek text breaks the ideas down into two main emphases:

1. He himself is our peace...and
2. He has proclaimed peace to the far and near ones.

The [Block Diagram](#) of the Greek text highlights this core structure.

1. He himself is our peace (Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν). The central declaration is the Christ is our peace. What is meant by this? Peace between Jew and Gentile? Peace between sinful humanity and God? Or, both of the above? Probably the latter is the major point. Peace means that those afar off (Gentiles) have been brought near so that both groups (Jew & Gentile) now stand near, i.e., within access to God. But given the bitter animosity toward one another, they could only come together peacefully through a major miracle of transformation. Christ himself facilitates that transformation into peace with God and peace with one another.

If Isa. 57:19 is in Paul's mind to some extent, then his use of its terminology in the LXX goes counter to the current scribal interpretation. The far ones in scribal Judaism were Jewish Diaspora and the near ones were Palestinian Jews living in the homeland. Later on, this text was reinterpreted in rabbinical circles with the far ones being Jewish sinners and the near ones being righteous Jews. See b. *Berakot* 34b, *Num. Rab.* 11.7 and *Mek. Exod.* 20.25 in the Talmud for details. But Lincoln (*WBC*, Logos Systems) calls attention to at least one rabbinical tradition that sees the contrast between Jews and Gentiles (proselytes): *Num. Rab.* 8.

What is peace (ἡ εἰρήνη)? Again, Lincoln (*WBC*, Logos Systems) gives a helpful summation:

As is well known, in the OT the notion of peace (שָׁלוֹם, *šālôm*) involves more than the absence of war or cessation of hostilities. It denotes also positive well-being and salvation, and it is frequently seen as God's gift and as a major element of eschatological expectation. In this context in Eph 2, peace does, however, stand primarily for the cessation of hostilities and the resulting situation of unity. It is a relational concept which presupposes the overcoming of alienation (cf. vv 12, 13) and hostility (cf. v 15) between Gentiles and Jews. It is possible that for a Jew such a notion would recall the vision of eschatological peace which would prevail when the Gentiles joined Israel in worship in the temple in Zion, a vision found in Isa 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-4, although there is no conscious effort to invoke such prophecies here. It is neither peace with God (Rom 5:1) nor cosmic peace (Col 1:20) that is the focus of attention in v 14, although it becomes clear in vv 16-18 that the former is foundational for this writer also. Peace, in v 14, is not merely a concept nor even a new state of affairs, it is bound up with a person. Christ can be said to be not only a peacemaker or a bringer of peace but peace in person. The title "prince of peace" in Isa 9:6 may have prepared the way for such an attribution of peace to a person, but the language here is hardly an allusion to that verse (*contra* Stuhlmacher, " 'Er ist unser Friede,' " 345). Later rabbinic thought could call the name of God and of the Messiah "peace" (cf. Str-B 3:587) but not, of course, in specific connection with Jews and Gentiles. That Christ himself is seen as the peace between the two groups here in v 14 is in line with the thought of v 15 that the making of peace, by creating one new person in place of two, occurred "in himself." This identification of Christ with the blessings of salvation that he brings can be found in other places in the Pauline corpus (cf. 1 Cor 1:30; Col 1:27; 3:4).

With three participle phrases, Paul amplifies Christ as the source of peace.

a) "in his flesh he has made both groups into one" (ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἐν). Christ is the one who has brought Jew and Gentile together before God on a common plane. God seeks a unified people who serve Him. In Christ, such becomes possible. For the first century world -- and for ours as well -- the notion that Jews and Gentiles can come together on one footing before God was radical, and humanly impossible.

b) "and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (ὁ...καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ). Christ has broken down the partitionary wall. What's that? The appositional qualifier that follows, "the hostility between us" (τὴν ἔχθραν), defines it to some extent. Very possibly Paul had in mind the wall of partition in the Jerusalem temple that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the other inner courts where Jewish women and men were permitted to enter for worship. At the entrance to the inner courts was the above warning threatening death to any Gentile who crossed into the courts where Jews worshipped God. The trumped up accusation by Jewish purists that Paul had indeed encouraged a Gentile, a Trophimus from Ephesus no less, to cross that boundary in the Jerusalem temple was the reason for his imprisonment at Caesarea (cf. Acts 21:27-31). Most likely the Ephesians were aware of this incident in Jerusalem by this time. Although Paul had not actually encouraged Trophimus to do this out of respect for Jewish laws, he knew that in truth God had crossed out that warning chiseled in stone at the entrance gate of the temple inner courts.

c) "He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it." (ὁ... τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην καὶ ἀποκαταλλάξῃ τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἀποκτείνας τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν αὐτῷ). This most radical declaration is that in Christ God had done away with the Law. But the participle καταργήσας more precisely means that God rendered the Law useless as a means of salvation, as so understood in the Judaism of Paul's day. Paul is not saying that God did away

with the Old Testament. Nor with the Law itself, as embedded in the Old Testament. In Gal. 3:19-25, Paul earlier wrote that the Law serves a worthwhile purpose to define sinful activity and thus to point us to Christ. But, under no means can it provide salvation. The very hostility between Jew and Gentile in Paul's world was evidence of that. Christ alone can nullify that hostility and enable peace to reign. His intent in dying on the cross was 1) "that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace," and 2) "and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross." The impact? "thus putting to death that hostility through it."

2. He has proclaimed peace both to the far off and to the near ones: "17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father" (17 καὶ ἔλθων εὐηγγελίσατο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην τοῖς ἐγγύς; 18 ὅτι δι' αὐτοῦ ἔχομεν τὴν προσαγωγὴν οἱ ἀμφοτέροι ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα). Here Paul brings the τοῖς μακρὰν / τοῖς ἐγγύς (Gentile / Jew) contrast to the forefront. Now only is Christ Peace in its very embodiment, he has proclaimed this peace to both Jew and Gentile. Paul understood that the ministry of the historical Jesus was focused on the Jewish people. But he also saw what the gospel writers knew. Jesus ministry and message was ultimately for all humanity. It was not a message that before becoming a Christian you have to convert to Judaism because salvation belongs only to Jews. The cross of Christ nullifies any such thinking! This is the universal thrust of the Gospel.

In verse 18 Paul bases this universal thrust of the Gospel on the theological principle that both Jew and Gentile alike have access to the Father through the one Holy Spirit. This echoes the language of Rom. 5:1-2, "1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (NRSV). Paul will pick up the access theme again in Eph. 3:12, "Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him." That entrance gate in the Jerusalem temple was the visible access to God in the minds of Jews in Paul's day. Above it was the above listed inscribed stone forbidding Gentiles access. But that stone God removed at Calvary.

The marvelous truths of these verses concerning the work of Christ have tremendous relevance to our lives today as Christians. Our world is torn apart with hostility between groups of people using religion, ethnicity, social status, nationalism, political ideology et als. as the basis of hostility toward other groups. Even among Christian groups, partitioning walls have been built up around denominationalism, doctrine etc. Individual congregations often are divided and tension exists between different elements inside the church.

But in Christ none of this should be present among believers. The church is the great leveler of humanity. It is to bring people together in common commitment and worship of God from all kinds of backgrounds and differences. When we walk in obedience to Christ as a church this will take place in our midst.

III. Vanished differences, vv. 19-22

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

2.19 ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, 2.20 ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνναίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 2.21 ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὔξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, 2.22 ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι.

Almost in summary fashion, Paul draws some implications from the reconciling work of Christ in the previous discussion of vv. 14-18. He gathers up some of the beginning motifs of vv. 11-13. But the image of a new temple is the major motif of his thoughts here.

The syntactical structure of the two core expressions is "not that" but "this." The positive side is couched in the temporal "no longer" (οὐκέτι). He returns to the second person plural verb focus thus highlighting attention on his initial Gentile readers. Two sets of traits stand on either side of the contrast:

Not that:

1) strangers (ξένοι).

2) aliens (πάροικοι).

But this:

1) citizens with the saints (συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων)

2) members of the household of God (οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ)

A subtle play on contrastive words is present in the Greek text that can't be reproduced in English translation. The first label on either side of the contrast plays off being either a non-citizen or a citizen. The second label

in each contrast builds off the image of being either (outside the household) or being a household member. So the parallels move from citizenship to family membership. These two dramatic images for Paul's world help highlight the miraculous transformation that takes place in coming to Christ. Gentile Christians in Christ now stand as righteous members of those dedicated to God, the saints. They additionally have been adopted into God's family with equal status to their Jewish Christian brothers.

In the participle clause expansion of vv. 20-22 the citizenship / family images shift to that of a house under construction (ἐποικοδομηθέντες). The Aorist passive participle form implies the construction process has already been put in place. This house, we discover at the end of the clause, is nothing less than a new dwelling place for God in this world. Thus it replaces the temple in Jerusalem.

Several modifiers of the participle add details to the temple image. Its foundation is the gospel message of the apostles and (probably) Christian prophets of the apostolic era. The cornerstone or cap stone that holds everything together is Jesus Christ himself. With the laying of each stone, a Christian community, a new temple is under construction. Gentile believers are a critical segment of that building. God already lives in this "under construction" temple while it is being built. He does so through His Spirit. The construction takes place "in Christ."

CONCLUSION

The marvelous declaration of this text is that no one who is in Christ is an outsider. In the spiritual community everyone stands on common ground and serves

God together as brothers and sisters in Christ. To be sure, the surrounding society we live in will continue to impose distinctions and evaluations. But as the people of God we must realize that only God's assessment matters, and that inside the believing community these differences have no relevance.

God has brought us together through Christ. He is inhabiting us as His temple on earth. And we as believers worship Him as the true people of God in this world.

Praise God forevermore.