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# ONE IN CHRIST (EPHESIANS 2:11-22)

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## TEXT

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**One in Christ.**<sup>\*</sup> <sup>11</sup> Therefore, remember that at one time you, Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by those called the circumcision, which is done in the flesh by human hands, <sup>12</sup> were at that time without Christ, alienated from the community of Israel<sup>\*</sup> and strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.<sup>j</sup> <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ.<sup>k</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup> The Gentiles lacked Israel's messianic expectation, lacked the various *covenants* God made with *Israel*, lacked *hope* of salvation and knowledge of the true *God* (Eph 2:11–12); but through Christ all these religious barriers between Jew and Gentile have been transcended (Eph 2:13–14) by the abolition of the Mosaic covenant-law (Eph 2:15) for the sake of uniting Jew and Gentile into a single religious community (Eph 2:15–16), imbued with the same holy *Spirit* and worshiping the same *Father* (Eph 2:18). The Gentiles are now included in God's *household* (Eph 2:19) as it arises upon the *foundation of apostles* assisted by those endowed with the prophetic gift (Eph 3:5), the preachers of Christ (Eph 2:20; cf. 1 Cor 12:28). With Christ as the *capstone* (Eph 2:20; cf. Is 28:16; Mt 21:42), they are being built into the holy *temple* of God's people where the divine presence dwells (Eph 2:21–22).

<sup>\*</sup> *The community of Israel*: or “commonwealth”; cf. Eph 4:18. *The covenants*: cf. Rom 9:4: with Abraham, with Moses, with David.

<sup>j</sup> Rom 9:4; Col 1:21, 27.

<sup>k</sup> 2:17; Is 57:19; Col 1:20.

<sup>14</sup>\*For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh,<sup>15</sup> abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person\* in place of the two, thus establishing peace,<sup>m 16</sup> and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it.<sup>n 17</sup> He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near,<sup>o 18</sup> for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.<sup>p</sup>

<sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God,<sup>q 20</sup> built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,<sup>r</sup> with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone.\* <sup>21</sup>Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord;<sup>s 22</sup> in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.<sup>t 1</sup>

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\* The elaborate imagery here combines pictures of Christ as *our peace* (Is 9:5), his crucifixion, the ending of the Mosaic law (cf. Col 2:14), reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–21), and the destruction of *the dividing wall* such as kept people from God in the temple or a barrier in the heavens.

<sup>1</sup> Gal 3:28.

\* *One new person*: a corporate body, the Christian community, made up of Jews and Gentiles, replacing ancient divisions; cf. Rom 1:16.

<sup>m</sup> 2 Cor 5:17; Col 2:14.

<sup>n</sup> Col 1:20, 22.

<sup>o</sup> Is 57:19; Zec 9:10.

<sup>p</sup> 3:12.

<sup>q</sup> Heb 12:22–23.

<sup>r</sup> Is 28:16; Rev 21:14.

\* *Capstone*: the Greek can also mean cornerstone or keystone.

<sup>s</sup> 1 Cor 3:16; Col 2:19.

<sup>t</sup> 1 Pt 2:5.

<sup>1</sup> [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Eph 2:11–22.

## V. PEACE THROUGH THE CROSS (2:11–22)

2 <sup>11</sup> Remember, then, that in the past [and] in the realm of the flesh, you, the Gentiles—called The Uncircumcision by those who call themselves The Circumcision, that handmade operation in the realm of the flesh ... <sup>12</sup> [Remember] that at that time you were apart from the Messiah, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, strangers to the covenants based upon promise. In this world you were bare of hope and without God. <sup>13</sup> But now you are [included] in the realm of the Messiah Jesus. Through the blood of the Messiah you who in the past stood far off have been brought near.

<sup>14</sup> For [we confess]

He is in person the peace between us.

He has made both [Gentiles and Jews] into one.

For he has broken down the dividing wall,  
in his flesh [he has wiped out all] enmity.

<sup>15</sup> He has abolished the law [, that is, only] the commandments  
[expressed] in statutes.

[This was] to make peace by creating in his person  
a single new man out of the two,

<sup>16</sup> and to reconcile both to God  
through the cross in one single body.

In his own person he has killed the enmity.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed when he came, he proclaimed good news:  
“Peace to you who are far and peace to those near!”

<sup>18</sup> Through him and in one single Spirit  
the two [of us] have free access to the Father.

<sup>19</sup> Accordingly you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. <sup>20</sup> You are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the keystone being the Messiah Jesus himself.

<sup>21</sup> The whole construction, fitted together in him, grows in the Lord into a holy temple.

<sup>22</sup> In him you, too, are being built together so as to be a dwelling of God in the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

### One in Christ

**11** Διὸ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ποτὲ ὑμεῖς τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί, οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀκροβυστία ὑπὸ τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς ἐν σαρκὶ χειροποιήτου, **12** ὅτι ἦτε τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ χωρὶς

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<sup>2</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 253.

Χριστοῦ, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες καὶ ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. **13** νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἱ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγενήθητε ἐγγὺς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

**14** Αὐτὸς γάρ ἐστιν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὃ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἐν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἔχθραν<sup>a</sup> ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ,<sup>b</sup> **15** τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην **16** καὶ ἀποκαταλλάξῃ τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἀποκτείνας τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν αὐτῷ. **17** καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσατο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην τοῖς ἐγγύς **18** ὅτι δι' αὐτοῦ ἔχομεν τὴν προσαγωγὴν οἱ ἀμφότεροι ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. **19** ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι ἀλλ' ἐστὲ συμπολίται τῶν ἀγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, **20** ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ<sup>c</sup> τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, **21** ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ<sup>3</sup> συναρμολογουμένη αὔξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, **22** ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι. <sup>3</sup>

## COMMENTARY

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The peculiar thing about what Paul says in this passage is that what must have looked to his readers to be the vastly greater and wider river [the Gentile world in all its vastness stretched throughout the world] has joined a far smaller one [the Judaeo-Christians] — **but it's the smaller one that gives its name to the river that now continues with the two streams merged into one.** The great, wide river is the worldwide company of Gentiles, the non-Jewish nations stretching across the world and back in time, including the glories of classical Greece, Rome, Egypt, Mesopotamia, China and the rest of the many-splendoured globe. The smaller river is the single family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, described here as 'the community of Israel'. Somehow, in the strange mapping system that the one God has chosen to operate, Gentiles and Jews have become one in the confluence that is Jesus the Messiah. And, as the river continues on its way, it bears not only the name of Israel, but also the hope that flows from the covenants of promise made with the Israelite patriarchs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, Fifth Revised Edition. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), Eph 2:11–22.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 25–26.

**This description of Christian life leads the author into a discussion of God’s bringing together of Jew and Gentile into the church, *what he calls the “mystery” of God’s plan (2:11–3:21)*. Paul too speaks of God’s dealings with Israel and the Gentiles as a “mystery” (Rom. 11:25). **Ephesians, though, merges the two ethnic groups into “one new humanity” (2:15)**, whereas Paul steadfastly maintains their separate identities before God and God’s abiding faithfulness to ethnic Israel. Ephesians employs Paul’s concept of the “body of Christ” (see Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:12–31) to describe not the local congregations to which Paul refers but the universal—even cosmic—reality of the one church (2:16). **This universalizing of the concept of the church is yet another result of the author’s earthly/heavenly dichotomy. If all believers share the same heavenly identity, there should be no discernible distinctions among individual Christian communities.** Whereas Paul describes the church as the body of Christ, with feet, ears, eyes, noses, hands, heads, and even “dishonorable parts” (1 Cor. 12:15–25), Ephesians specifies that Christ alone is the head of his ecclesiastical body (1:22; 4:15; 5:23).... **Such a picture of the church universal as a reflection of God’s “fullness” (3:19), harmonious in all its parts and heavenly in its identity, prepares for the second half of the letter, *a series of ethical exhortations (4:1–6:20)*.**<sup>5</sup>**

The “you” are now identified specifically as Gentiles, while the “we” belong to the “commonwealth of Israel.” The “once but now” pattern applies to the prior division of the two groups, now brought together as one. Since the next section (3:1–21) depicts the apostle as the one who proclaimed this mystery, some interpreters treat 2:11–3:21 as a single section. However, 3:1 marks a strong rhetorical transition by introducing the apostle’s character. Therefore, it introduces a new section in the epistle.<sup>6</sup>

Phrases from Col 1:19–22 inform Eph 2:14–16. Colossians describes “peace” (*eirēnē*) as the reconciliation with God brought about through Christ’s death on the cross. **However, Colossians does not provide the image of a dividing wall of hostility that is central to Ephesians (vv. 14, 16c).** Ephesians departs from the cosmological perspective of Colossians, which referred to reconciling heaven and earth, to focus on the human dimension. ***Salvation has brought Jew and Gentile together in a single body.***<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> E. Elizabeth Johnson, “[Ephesians](#),” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Jacqueline E. Lapsley, and Sharon H. Ringe, Revised and Updated. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 577–578.

<sup>6</sup> PHEME PERKINS, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible* (ed. Leander E. Keck; vol. 11; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 11396.

<sup>7</sup> PHEME PERKINS, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible* (ed. Leander E. Keck; vol. 11; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 11396.

Paul now shows that this coming together of Jew and Gentile in the one family is achieved—as is almost everything else in his theology—through **the cross of Jesus the Messiah**. *This has brought the pagans close in, from being far away (verse 13). It has torn down the barrier that used to stand between the two families (verse 14). It has abolished the Jewish law, the Torah—not in the sense that God didn’t give it in the first place, but in the sense that the Jewish law had, as one of its main first-century uses, the keeping apart of Jew and Gentile (verse 15). The hostility that had existed between the two groups has itself been killed on the cross (verse 16).* Paul probably didn’t have in mind the way in which Herod and Pilate became friends at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion (Luke 23:12), but that little story makes the point well.... The point of it all, as he says in verse 15, was **to create a single new humanity in place of the two**.<sup>8</sup>

**Verse 11 – Remember.** See the Note on 1:16 and the literature mentioned there. **Repentance, decision, and gratitude are called for, not a mental recollection only.**<sup>9</sup>

Colossians 2:11 speaks of believers receiving a circumcision “not of human hands” (see 2:13). **Within first-century Judaism, references to “spiritual circumcision” or circumcision of the heart distinguish members of sects that claim true devotion to God from other Jews (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4).**<sup>146</sup> By speaking of the “circumcision made in the flesh by human hands” (also Rom 2:25–29), **the speaker in Ephesians dissociates himself from those Jews who used the derogatory term “uncircumcised” for the Gentiles.** The expression “in the flesh” (ἐν σαρκί *en sarki*) was used for those born Gentiles in v. 11a (NRSV, “by birth”) and then for the external circumcision of Jews in v. 11b. Whatever exists merely “in the flesh” cannot express God’s new creation (v. 10).<sup>10</sup>

**The emphasis on uniting Jew and Gentile** suggests a context that includes actual experiences of Jew and Gentile separation in the first century CE. Jewish exclusiveness frequently led to charges of misanthropy.<sup>148</sup> There is considerable debate over the extent

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<sup>8</sup> Tom Wright, [\*Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon\*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 27.

<sup>9</sup> Markus Barth, [\*Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3\*](#), vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 254.

<sup>146</sup> *Jub.* 1.23; Philo *On the Special Laws* 1.205; 1QpHab 11:13; 1QS 5:5.

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

<sup>10</sup> PHEME PERKINS, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible* (ed. Leander E. Keck; vol. 11; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 11397.

\*148 Josephus *Against Apion* 2.258; Tacitus *Histories* 5.5.1.

to which first-century Jews encouraged sympathetic Gentiles to join the commonwealth of Israel.<sup>149</sup> When the initiative came from the Gentile convert, Jews did accept proselytes.<sup>150</sup> **Relationships between Jews and Gentiles in the cities of Asia Minor seem to have been more complex than a simple division suggests.** For example, inscriptions and other documents show that Jews and Gentiles exchanged benefactions.<sup>151</sup> 11

**Verse 12 – *bare of hope*.** The same description of Gentiles is found in 1 Thess 4:13; however, in Isa 11:10<sup>27</sup> the Messiah is described as the one upon whom the Gentiles will hope, whereas in the context of Wisd Sol 15:6 the objects of the Gentiles' hope are mentioned—and ridiculed. While Bengel affirms that in Eph 2:12 the absence of the “Messianic hope” is meant, **Abbott suggests the words “bare of hope” be understood “in the evident sense.”** **Robinson sees the lack of hope among Gentiles epitomized in the yearning backward for a lost golden age.** Israel’s uniqueness would then exist in its orientation toward the future (see e.g. Gen 12:15; 2 Sam 7; Dan 7, etc.). But such a view cannot stand up to the facts since Israel cannot claim a monopoly on prospective hope; neither are Israelite writings and prayers free of retrospection and nostalgic elements. **Belief in progress, perfection, the immortality of the soul, a future savior king is expressed among Gentiles as fervently as among Jews and Christians.**<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, in the OT as well as in rabbinic teaching, Paradise, Sinai, or Zion typology were often used for describing eschatological and apocalyptic hopes; the last things were more than once expected to be like the first. Would the author of Ephesians have been so ignorant or unfair as to declare all Gentiles void of any and all hope? **Unless Paul flippantly denied or dispossessed the Gentiles of any hope, he must have meant a specific hope. This “hope,” then, could be understood as fostered in the minds of the**

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\*149 See Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

\*150 Josephus *Against Apion* 2.210.

\*151 Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*, SNTSMS 69 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

11 PHEME PERKINS, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 397.

\*27 Cf. Isa 42:4, as alluded to in Rom 15:12 and Matt 12:21.

\*28 See, e.g. *Sibylline Oracles* I 167 ff. and the materials collected in M. Dibelius, “Jungfrauensohn und Krippenkind,” in *Botschaft und Geschichte* I, Tübingen: Mohr, 1953; E. Rohde, *Psyche*, I–II, 5th ed., Tübingen: Mohr, 1910. In the present time Marxists, e.g. E. Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 2 vols., Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1959, are more than others determined by hope.

OT Old Testament

Jews, because it was founded and guaranteed in the heart of God or “laid up in heaven” as Col 1:5 puts it. In Eph 1:12 and 18 hope of the latter kind is meant. It is the hope for the promised Messiah from the root of David (Rom 1:1–3). But a variant reading of 4:19 supports Abbott’s and Robinson’s interpretation and affirms *the Gentiles’ subjective despair*. If Eph 2:12 does not allude to the absence of the Messianic hope but rather alludes to total despair, then this passage fits the pattern of Jewish anti-pagan polemics.<sup>29</sup> It would, however, fall out of the Christological orientation of Ephesians.<sup>12</sup>

Verse 12 – *without God*. In Greek, one single word (the adjective *atheos*) describes the ultimate reason for and the darkest aspect of the Gentiles’ former status. The Greek word *atheos*, from which the English “atheist” is derived, does not occur in the LXX, the apocryphal books, or elsewhere in the NT. It denotes either a person not believing in a deity, or an impious despiser of law and tradition, or a god-forsaken man.<sup>30</sup> These multiple meanings made it possible for the term to be liberally used in manifold polemics. Socrates was accused of atheism; Jews and Christians used the term to describe the Gentiles; Gentiles hurled it at Jews and Christians; Christians welcomed it as a tool for confounding heretics.<sup>31</sup> Though in Eph 2:12 this term seems at first sight to contain no more than such a “paying back with the same coin,” its place at the conclusion of the list of the Gentiles’ former characteristics indicates a more important purpose. At first the difference between Jews and Gentiles was described in the ceremonial and external terms of “Circumcision” and “Uncircumcision”; then it was designated by the political, legal, sociological, and psychological concepts, “apart from the Messiah,” “excluded from the citizenship of Israel,” “strangers,” “bare of hope.” Now, at the conclusion, the difference is depicted as soteriological and theological. God himself had not shown that he cared for the Gentiles! They

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Wisd Sol 13:10, “their hopes set on dead things.”

<sup>12</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 259.

LXX The Septuagint, ed. E. Rahlfs. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelgesellschaft, 1935

NT New Testament, Neues Testament, Nouveau Testament

<sup>30</sup> LSLex, s.v.; Abbott.

<sup>31</sup> Plato *apologia* 26 C; *Sib. Or.* VIII 395; *Martyrium Polycarpi* (henceforth *Mart. Pol.*) IX 2b; *Ps.-Clem. hom.* xv 4; Clement of Alexandria *paed.* III 11, 80. The many gods of the Gentiles were—by Jews, as in Gal 4:8; cf. 1 Cor 8:4–6; Rom 1:23—considered non-gods. The immoral conduct or practices of Gentiles proved that foolishness instead of the fear of God ruled among them. See, e.g. Isa 44:9–10; Wisd Sol 12:23–27; 13–15; Josephus *contra Apionem* II 148; *Mart. Pol.* III; IX 2c; Justin Martyr *apol.* I 6:1; 13:1; Ign. *Trall.* x; perhaps also III 2.

have been God-forsaken people. In the words of Deut 10:15, 4:19, 32:8, “The Lord set his heart in love upon your fathers and chose their dependents after them, you above all peoples ... The sun, the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven ... the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples ... He separated the sons of men.” Cf. 1 Kings 8:53, “Thou didst separate them [i.e. Israel] from among all the peoples of the earth.”<sup>13</sup>

**Verse 14** – *He is in person the peace between us.* Lit. “He is our peace.” *Pulcherrimus titulus Christi*, says Calvin. The words “in person” were added three times in the translation of vss. 14–16; they correspond to the emphasis which the Greek pronoun “he himself” (*autos*) possesses, especially in acclamations. **The translation “peace between us” is found in JB and precludes any misunderstanding: Christ is praised here not primarily for the peace he brings to individual souls; rather the peace he brings is a social and political event** (cf. Comment II on 1:1–2 and Comment V below). The “Messianic peace” here proclaimed is in Eph 4:3 distinctly called a “bond” uniting different people.<sup>14</sup>

**Verse 14** – The verbs “wiping out” and “removing from the middle” are used in a passage parallel to Eph 2:14, i.e. in Col 2:14, when the destruction of a document is meant. **The (aorist) tense “he has broken down” reveals that Paul wants to speak of the factual, historical, completed destruction of the obstacle.** Do good fences make good neighbors? “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall” (Robert Frost). At this point Paul does not discuss the possibility, desirability, or necessity of the saints operating to wreck and remove the barrier. **He wants to proclaim no more and no less than an event created, and a fact accomplished by Jesus Christ once and for all. All later imperatives demanding reconciliation stand upon the basis of this fact.** “God has reconciled us to himself through Christ ... He has put among us the word of reconciliation ... Therefore, we ask in Christ’s name, Be reconciled with God” (2 Cor 5:18–20).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 260.

Lit. Literal, word-by-word translation which appears to render the Greek exactly but may not express its meaning

<sup>14</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 262.

<sup>15</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 263.

**Verse 14 – the dividing wall.** Lit. “the division-wall of the fence.” The Greek noun *mesotoichon*, translated by the adjective “dividing,” is not found in pre-Christian Greek, and nowhere in the NT except here.<sup>49</sup> It means a partition inside a house. The other term, *phragmos*, translated by “wall,” signifies originally a fence or railing erected for protection rather than separation.<sup>50</sup> The combination of the two Greek nouns yields a composite sense: it is a wall that prevents certain persons from entering a house or a city (cf. 2:19), and is as much a mark of hostility (2:14, 16) as, e.g. a ghetto wall, the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall, a racial barrier, or a railroad track that separates the right from the wrong side of the city, **not to speak of the wall between state and church.**<sup>16</sup>

Rudolf Schnackenburg prefers to read vv. 14–16 as an elaborate periodic sentence similar to those found earlier in Ephesians. Its phrases alternate between references to the negative things that must be destroyed and to the positive result of Christ’s coming, making peace. **References to Christ are threaded throughout: (a) “himself ... in his own flesh” (v. 14); (b) “in himself” (v. 15); (c) “in one body ... in himself” (v. 16)....** The negative phrases all refer to what must be destroyed: (a) a barrier (v. 14*b*); (b) law of commandments and decrees (v. 15*a*); (c) enmity (vv. 14*c*, 16*b*). **Unity is not merely the end of human enmity. It also involves reconciliation with God through the cross. Verse 16 is the only explicit reference to “the cross” in Ephesians.** This reference is connected with images in this section taken from Col 1:20–22: “making peace,” God’s willingness to “reconcile,” the “blood of his cross,” and being “estranged.” **Ephesians**

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Lit. Literal, word-by-word translation which appears to render the Greek exactly but may not express its meaning

NT New Testament, Neues Testament, Nouveau Testament

<sup>49</sup> Morgenthaler, *Statistik*, pp. 175, 177.

<sup>50</sup> E.g. Isa 5:5; Matt 21:33.

<sup>16</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 263–264.

has used the hymnic phrases from Colossians to depict the new unity of Jew and Gentile.<sup>160 17</sup>

**Verses 17-22:** One of the greatest worldwide problems of our time is the plight of refugees and asylum-seekers. People in the West sometimes try to pretend that the world is now a civilized place where most people can go about their business in peace, and at least relative prosperity. But the evidence suggests that this is over-optimistic. More people than ever, it seems, are displaced from homes and homelands, and find themselves wandering the world in search of somewhere to live. The countries where they arrive are often overwhelmed, and find that their resources, and their patience, are under strain, despite feeling sympathetic to people who have often suffered a great deal.... **What refugees want above all, assuming that they can never return to their original homes, is to be accepted into a new community where they can rebuild their lives and their families. And the ultimate sign of that acceptance is to receive citizenship in the country they have adopted as their own. Their new passport is often their proudest possession.** At last they can hold their heads up and build a new sense of identity. Once they have done that, they may well abandon all thoughts of going back where they came from. They have arrived. They belong.<sup>18</sup>

**Verses 17-22:** This is what the gospel message announces. Gentiles and Jews alike are now to be at home in the same family. This must have sounded as extraordinary and revolutionary to traditional Jews—and Paul himself had of course been a traditional Jew—as it was wonderful and exhilarating for Gentiles who had looked at Judaism from the outside and felt drawn to the God of whom the Jewish scriptures had spoken.<sup>19</sup>

**Verses 19-22 – But the building itself has, as its peculiar glory, the way in which bricks from two quite different quarries are to be built into it side by side, joined together in a new kind of architectural beauty.** Jewish believers and Gentile believers, in other words, are not simply fellow members of the Christian community. Together,

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<sup>160</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. H. Heron (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) 107.

<sup>17</sup> Pheme Perkins, [“The Letter to the Ephesians.”](#) in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 398.

<sup>18</sup> Tom Wright, [Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 28–29.

<sup>19</sup> Tom Wright, [Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 29.

and only together, they form the community in which the living God will be delighted to take up residence.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Tom Wright, [\*Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon\*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 30–31.