

## ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF RACIAL RECONCILIATION ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF EPH 2:11-22

BRUCE W. FONG\*

Noted international evangelist Billy Graham stated: "Racial and ethnic hostility is the foremost social problem facing our world today."<sup>1</sup> This startling observation suggests that racism is more than just one of many problems in the world. Rather, it is a major issue and one of global proportions. Such a recognition calls for deliberate and responsible attention by all people.

Racism is having a devastating effect on the whole world. But the problem is not exclusive to the secular realm. The Church has also contributed to this tragic scene with an "indifference and resistance by Christians who are intolerant toward those of other backgrounds, ignoring their spiritual and physical needs."<sup>2</sup>

Yet this ugly stripe of guilt in the Church is inconsistent with her very identity as bearers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Love is to be the badge of Christian discipleship, not bigotry, preference or racial bias. At the very heart of Christianity is God's acceptance of anyone through Christ regardless of race, language or class. Thus while in many cases the Church is a contributor to the problem, Christians with the gospel of the redemptive work of Christ have the answer to the world's quest toward racial reconciliation.

A basic provision that results from the redemptive work of Christ is the union of both Jewish (Hebraic) and Gentile<sup>3</sup> (Hellenistic) ideas and people into a single Christian Church.<sup>4</sup> This international blend of two formerly distinct groups<sup>5</sup> that once thrived on mutual animosity toward each other demonstrates the divine intent to formulate a Church comprised of a single

\* Bruce Fong is assistant professor of homiletics and Bible at Multnomah Biblical Seminary, 8435 N.E. Glisan Street, Portland, OR 97220.

<sup>1</sup> B. Graham, "Racism and the Evangelical Church," *Christianity Today* (October 4, 1993) 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> My use of "Gentile" is not a designation of a single or distinct ethnic group by itself. Rather, it is an identification of a group of people (made up of many ethnic groups itself) that is distinct from Jews, as Paul used the distinction in Ephesians 2.

<sup>4</sup> The formation of any church strategy must begin with the precepts that God outlined when he began the Church. The Church is to be "a new reconciled society in which no curtains, walls or barriers are tolerated, and in which the divisive influences of race, nationality, rank and sex have been destroyed." Furthermore, God intends that his Church be "a model of what human community looks like when it comes under his rule of righteousness and peace" (J. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* [Hants: Marshalls, 1984] 101).

<sup>5</sup> My reference to the Jews and Gentiles as "formerly distinct groups" concerns those who became converted to Christianity. Both designations continued to be distinct for both groups for those outside of the Church.

people. Such a singleness of identity is not accomplished by ignoring or deleting cultural, ethnic or other social distinctives. Those features continue to exist and remain as an important part of a person's individual identity. These two groups, however, now share something in common with each other that surpasses their differences. Their commonness is something new, brought about and made possible by the grace of God.

This new identity common among all Christians and initiated at conversion has not continued to be a priority in practical relationships among members of today's Church.<sup>6</sup> Even though the theological reality of uniting Jew and Gentile into a single visible fellowship is acknowledged as a spiritual fact, church members of varying ethnic backgrounds are still at odds with each other, a fact that is evident in varying forms of racial tension.<sup>7</sup> Some critics argue that the Church is more known for its racial separation and conformity to society's patterns rather than representing a new way of life, a new order of community, or a new value of equality.<sup>8</sup> But of all the elements contributing to this unpleasant reputation, a lack of Biblical or spiritual guidance cannot be identified as instrumental to the problem. Quite the contrary. The NT<sup>9</sup> speaks to this issue both in quantity and in direct address. It pointedly declares a kind of unity that is required of all Christians not as an obligation to obtain spiritual merit but as an expression of a spiritual reality already possessed.

One of the key passages of Scripture that addresses this tension is Eph 2:11–22.<sup>10</sup> Since God has reconciled both Jew<sup>11</sup> and Gentile in the NT there

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of ongoing racial tensions within the Church see A. Tapia, "The Myth of Racial Progress," *Christianity Today* (October 4, 1993) 16–27.

<sup>7</sup> There is a touch of irony in this, particularly when a Christian gathering is comprised primarily of converted Gentiles. While the cross of Christ joined two of the world's most antagonistic ethnic groups (Jew and Gentile), the result is a Church where many cannot accept one another with equality (Gentile and Gentile).

<sup>8</sup> The Church must be consistent in her effort to address the issue of racial reconciliation. L. Sweet argues: "It is the height of hypocrisy for the church to decry with one breath ethnic minority [institutions] and then, with the next breath, to idealize ethnic minority churches" ("The Rainbow Church," *Christian Ministry* [November 2, 1988] 7). For a further discussion of the part that the Church can have in racial reconciliation see R. E. Kendal, *Christianity and Race* (British Council of Churches, 1982); K. Jenkins, *The Closed Door* (British Council of Churches, 1984); A. G. Hunter and S. G. Mackie, *A National Church in a Multi-Racial Scotland* (Scottish Churches Council, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> Exploring the NT for guidance in the area of racial equality is not unanimously favored. For example, C. F. Sleeper warns that it can be dangerous to hunt in the NT for answers that deal with complex questions of social ethics, such as race relations. Sleeper's comment is a precaution growing out of his preference to derive a basis for social ethics from the entire Bible to avoid proof-texting a problem. Yet if a central text of Scripture makes a clear statement on an issue such as race relations, the onus is on any effort that contradicts it to defend its position first. See C. F. Sleeper, *Black Power and Christian Responsibility* (New York, 1969).

<sup>10</sup> C. H. Dodd identifies in this text the basis for racial reconciliation, referring to "the effectual overcoming of a longstanding and deep-rooted enmity, which we may fairly treat as a model of the process of reconciliation between nations" (*Christianity and the Reconciliation of the Nations*, p. 25).

<sup>11</sup> In the discussion of Ephesians 2 as related to the race issue, it is important to note that there is a measure of reluctance on the part of a few to even consider the Jews as a racial group.

are a number of substantial implications for the Church in formulating a positive attitude toward race relations, particularly in the area of growth and development.<sup>12</sup>

Part of the problem in applying Scripture to race relations is that culture, which is frequently impregnated with racial biases, influences any discussion of the Church and its responsibility toward racial equality.<sup>13</sup> William Rader observes that there is substantial information dealing with the problem of racial discrimination. It is readily available to churches, but the material with its insights comes from sociology, psychology and contemporary literature. Very little comes from theological or Biblical studies.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this is one of the fundamental reasons that the homogeneous unit principle<sup>15</sup> has met such energetic support as well as challenge. Churches that have a strong desire to grow but struggle to attain that goal are presented with an appealing growth strategy that is based on a sociological and pragmatic phenomenon. On the surface it appears to be reasonable, but it fails to adequately address the basic Biblical principle stated for example in Ephesians 2 or in a theology that adequately portrays Christ.<sup>16</sup> To properly formulate an accurate strategy that church leaders and laypeople can implement in their assemblies they must evaluate its foundation of reasoning. That is, as a first priority any growth philosophy adopted by the Church should be tested against the precepts of the NT. A key passage from which a foundation for addressing this issue may be developed is Eph 2:11–22.

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It is argued that the Jewish people occupy a unique place in history. Also a case is made that they are not just one people among many but are chosen by God. Furthermore it is said that Israel has not consistently maintained her own understanding of a religious or racial emphasis. Nevertheless, in contrast to such objections it is apparent in Scripture that Jews are racially distinguished as a group from Gentiles (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Also, Israel was chosen to represent all mankind. And whenever Jewish-Gentile relationships are examined they represent relationships with all other human groups. Lastly, the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in the Church is the first visible step to God's plan to "unite all things in Christ" (Eph 1:10). For further discussion see W. Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility: A History of Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–22* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]) 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>13</sup> In relationship to his own church's struggle with the white-black issue, Rader notes: "We had been so accustomed to congregations which reflected the divisions in society that it was difficult to conceive that this might be denial of the very nature of the church" (ibid.).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> For a definition and argument in favor of this perspective see D. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 163–178. For a critique see *Exploring Church Growth* (ed. W. Shenk; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); B. W. Fong, *A Critique of the Homogeneous Unit Principle According to a Practical Theology Perspective* (dissertation; University of Aberdeen, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> The appearance of churches in North America is distinctively homogeneous, but that does not make it correct. L. Sweet explains this phenomenon as a natural human tendency: "Whether we are black, brown or white, we tend to want to worship with 'our kind of people'" ("The Rainbow Church: Building Rainbows in the World Is the Task of the Church," *Christian Ministry* [March 1986] 7).

I. A CHRISTIAN'S PAST SPIRITUAL HERITAGE AND PRESENT SPIRITUAL UNION CANNOT BE SEPARATED (EPH 2:11–13)

Paul begins this text with a strong reminder of the Gentiles' past relationship with God. It was no relationship at all. The inferential particle *dio* is the strongest that Paul could have used to portray this contrast of past and present. What follows is a personal and ethical application of Paul's previous discussion—that is, Gentile Christians should automatically contemplate their desperate past from which God has graciously delivered them.<sup>17</sup> This emphasis on divine mercy would prompt them to express their gratitude for the wonder of their salvation.<sup>18</sup>

To enhance this contrast even further, Gentile believers are commanded never to forget their pre-salvation condition.<sup>19</sup> The contrast between their pre-conversion state and their consequential state as converted Christians was intentionally raised to emphasize a drastic change. Gentiles were distinct at birth and called the "uncircumcision" by the Jews. This physical distinction and all that it represented was the reason for Jewish disparagement.<sup>20</sup> The physical difference was symbolic of a completely separate way of life.<sup>21</sup> What once began as a symbol for spiritual loyalty eroded into an ugly racial tension. Consequently, both socially and spiritually a wall of separation<sup>22</sup> existed between them. If what was symbolized by this physical mark were fleshed out in daily living, then God's chosen people, the Jews, would not mix at all with Gentiles.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce observe the effect of a poignant comparison and contrast: "Nothing is so apt to promote gratitude as a retrospective glance fixed on the hole of the pit from whence we have been dug out" (*Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957] 58).

<sup>18</sup> S. D. F. Salmond notes that the recollection by Christians of their horrible past from which they have been delivered "will make them more thankful for their present privilege, and more careful to walk in good works which God has in view for them" ("The Epistle to the Ephesians," *The Expositor's Greek New Testament* [ed. W. R. Nicoll; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974] 3.291).

<sup>19</sup> Salmond provides a helpful statement in this regard: "The term [*sarki*] also is to be taken literally, not as referring to the former unregenerate life, but . . . in the sense of *flesh* to which *circumcision* is applicable. they are reminded that they belonged to the class of the Gentiles, their bodies proclaiming their heathen character" (*ibid.*).

<sup>20</sup> Salmond explains the frustration of Gentiles who were under the eye of Jewish scrutiny: "The point seems to be that the inferiority in which they were held, and which was expressed by the contemptuous name *Uncircumcision*, meant all the more as it was fastened on them by those to whom, while proudly calling themselves the *Circumcision*, the distinction was nothing more than an outward manual act performed on their bodies" (*ibid.*).

<sup>21</sup> The intensity of alienation resulting from the lack of this physical mark of distinction was for most Gentiles too overwhelming to comprehend; cf. H. C. G. Moule, *Studies in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977) 75.

<sup>22</sup> A practical benefit of remembering one's past is the resulting contrast that drives one to appreciate the benefits of grace. F. F. Bruce notes: "It is salutary from time to time to be reminded of what we were apart from God's grace, in order that we may the better appreciate the riches of His grace and be armed against the temptation of having high thoughts of ourselves" (*The Epistle to the Ephesians* [London: Pickering and Inglis, 1961] 52–53).

<sup>23</sup> H. W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition* (ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck; Wheaton: Victor, 1983) 625.

Because the Gentiles lacked physical circumcision or the sign of being God's chosen people, they also lacked three privileges<sup>24</sup> that God had given exclusively to Israel. The Jews took great pride in relishing these advantages. And every Gentile who crossed the path of a Jew would quickly be educated. (1) They were "separate from Christ."<sup>25</sup> That is, they did not have a personal relationship with Christ, and they had no messianic hope as a people belonging to God's nation.<sup>26</sup> (2) They were "excluded from citizenship in Israel."<sup>27</sup> To be identified with Israel was to be identified with God. Theocratically, Israel's salvation was inseparable from her national blessing from God.<sup>28</sup> Even though individual Gentiles could and did become proselytes, thus adopting the national and theocratic aspects of Israel, Gentiles as a whole were excluded. The term "excluded" is very strong. The contrast is between one who is a total stranger and one who is at home.<sup>29</sup> (3) They were "foreigners to the covenants of the promise." Israel looked forward to future glory and blessing as God's chosen people.<sup>30</sup> They counted on being blessed

<sup>24</sup> Simpson and Bruce describe the Jewish advantage that the Gentiles did not have: "The Hebrew theocracy, despite its decadence, abode the pharos of the world's illumination, and to be remote from its beacon-gleam was to dwell in darkness or be mocked by tantalizing wild-fires. Substance, solidity, satisfaction, the cults of heathendom had none to proffer. Their forlorn plight is delineated in three sable strokes as *Christless, Godless, hopeless*" (*Commentary* 59).

<sup>25</sup> Some might point out that Israel was not always faithful to her Messiah, often marking history with acts of disobedience and rebellious moments that clearly indicated a lack of faith. While acknowledging this, however, R. Paxson observes: "There was always a remnant of the true Israel that kept its faith fixed on that Coming One, while the Gentiles were just a race of individual pagans having no essential oneness except in sin. They had no part in the promised Messiah and no claim upon Him" (*The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian* [Old Tappan: Revell, 1939] 62).

<sup>26</sup> Salmond explains the significance of this phrase: "[It] describes their former condition as one in which they had no connection with Christ; in which respect they were in a position sadly inferior to that of the Jews whose attitude was one of hoping and waiting for Christ, the Messiah" ("Epistle" 292).

<sup>27</sup> Jewish contempt for Gentile outsiders is sensed by W. Barclay's observation: "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 He had made. The best of the serpents crush, they said, the best of the Gentiles. 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" (*The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* [Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1964] 125).

<sup>28</sup> The concepts of "exclusion" and "citizenship" do not imply that there was once a previous unity. T. K. Abbott suggests that if a Greek or Roman concept of citizenship was the apostle's intent there may be some merit to this idea. But "it is the theocratic constitution from which they were excluded; and the name Israel implies this, since this was the name of the people in their theocratic relation" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, reprint 1977] 58).

<sup>29</sup> Abbott notes: "The verb always means to estrange; hence therefore 'estranged from' as opposed to 'being at home in'" (*ibid.* 57).

<sup>30</sup> Hope is at the heart of the Jewish faith. The nation of Israel was certain of her origin, certain of her purpose now, and even more sure of her future glory. "For the Jew all life was an appeal from an impossible present to a radiant future; that is to say, the Jewish view of history is essentially, inherently, innately optimistic. On the other hand for the Gentile history was going nowhere" (Barclay, *Letters* 126).

as a nation, and they lived for this hope<sup>31</sup> promised to Abraham. But Gentiles had no such hope.<sup>32</sup>

As a nation, Israel was certain of her future glory. Gentiles could only envy from a distance. Furthermore Israel could look to the future with optimism. No matter how oppressive their current situation was, they had a hope<sup>33</sup> of national redemption. All Jews took great pride in their faith in future deliverance. They detested the nations for their oppression of Israel and shunned them, calling them “dogs” unworthy of Israel’s future hope.<sup>34</sup> No Gentile nation could be so optimistic.<sup>35</sup>

This contrast for the Gentiles is clearly marked by the terms “formerly” (Eph 2:11) and “but now” (v. 13). The shift is enhanced further by the contrast of “separate from Christ” (v. 12) and “in Christ Jesus.” Gentiles in vv. 11–12 had a past that is no longer valid. Now they (“you,” v. 13) are “in Christ.” This is a new position for Gentiles that nullifies the woeful state previously described. They have not become Jews.<sup>36</sup> Judaism has not opened up to them. Israel has not granted them citizenship. Circumcision has not been imposed on them. Something far more inclusive than any one or any combination of these has been established.<sup>37</sup>

The Gentiles have gained all that they lacked in comparison to the Jews by means of Christ’s sacrificial death. The phrase “brought near by the blood of Christ” has a layered meaning. Bullinger describes the metalepsis in v. 13: “By His death, not by His life: yet not by His death alone, but by

<sup>31</sup> Abbott observes the strength of anticipation embodied in this nationalistic “hope”: “The absence of the article shows that it is not the definite hope of the Messiah that is meant, but hope in the widest sense, so that the expression is so much the stronger, ‘having no hope’” (*Commentary* 58–59).

<sup>32</sup> H. C. G. Measly describes the sense of the text: “The deep truth of this is fully attested by classical and other heathen literature, old or modern. Aspiration and conjecture there often was, but *no hope*, in the Scripture sense; no expectation on a firm basis. A profound uncertainty about the unseen and eternal underlies many of the strongest expressions of the classical poets and philosophers. And in the special reference of ‘hope’ here, hope of a Redeemer and a redeemed inheritance, there was (and is) a total blank, apart from revelation” (*Studies in Ephesians* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977] 77).

<sup>33</sup> “Hope” occurs here as an anarthrous noun, indicating that the hope for Messiah is not Paul’s reference but is hope in the widest sense; cf. n. 31 *supra*.

<sup>34</sup> This vast separation between Jew and Gentile was as intense as life and death. For example, if a Jewish boy or girl married a Gentile it was perceived as an event equivalent to death. Jewish families would conduct a funeral for that son or daughter. Even something as innocent as going into a Gentile house was considered an unclean thing to do. Cf. Barclay, *Letters* 125. In other words, for the Gentiles it “is not only that they had not the hope, the Messianic hope was one of the distinctions of the Israelite, but that they were utterly without hope. Ignorant of the Divine salvation and of Christ in whom it was found, they had nothing to hope for beyond this world” (Salmond, “Epistle” 292).

<sup>35</sup> Hoehner, “Ephesians” 625.

<sup>36</sup> The phrase “brought near” (v. 13) “is in contrast with the whole previous condition of separation from Christ, with all that that meant with regard to the commonwealth of Israel, the covenants, hope, and God. It is probably to be taken, therefore, in the large sense of being brought into the Kingdom of God, made near to God Himself and so brought to hope and privilege” (Salmond, “Epistle” 293). Barclay notes: “When the Rabbis spoke about accepting a convert into Judaism, they said that the proselyte to the faith had been ‘brought near’” (*Letters* 130).

<sup>37</sup> Hoehner, “Ephesians” 625.

the atonement made in His obedient act in dying for His people.<sup>38</sup> Because of the blood of Christ, Gentiles now enjoy all that Israel does regarding a future hope and present meaning in life. Sin had caused a separation between God and man. This barrier of separation was removed by Jesus' atonement.

At this point some could stop their analysis and declare that all believers share a common relationship as individuals to God. But this would only emphasize the breaking of the barrier between men and God. Instead we must continue to acknowledge that human groups have a new relationship to one another as a result of the gospel.<sup>39</sup>

## II. ALL CHRISTIANS SHARE IN A COMMON PEACE BOTH WITH THEIR FELLOW BELIEVERS AND WITH GOD (EPH 2:14–18)

Paul has made it clear that because of Christ's redeeming work Jews and Gentiles are now joined together. What that union involves is now addressed by the apostle. Primarily it consists of peace<sup>40</sup> that exists between Jew and Gentile on a horizontal plane and also between God and those who have put their faith in him on a vertical level.<sup>41</sup>

Jesus did not amalgamate one group into the other. He created something completely new. To accomplish this new man the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, was destroyed. The "and" that introduces the phrase "has destroyed the barrier" is exegetical, giving it the meaning "in that." Thus the new man was made by destroying the barrier.<sup>42</sup> The barrier that was destroyed was not fully erected by the Jews who despised Gentiles. Rather, the hostilities were mutually shared.<sup>43</sup> Hostilities on the part of Jews and Gentiles were destroyed by Christ. All who are in him have only his peace. The human walls of separation have been torn down.

<sup>38</sup> E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968) 610.

<sup>39</sup> Rader, *Church* 251.

<sup>40</sup> The peace that now exists between Jew and Gentile believers is Christ himself. "Christ is he who has made something new of the two: the near and the far, the insiders and the outsiders. 'In Christ those afar have become such that are near' (2:13). Christ is that reconciliation which is greater and stronger than the hostility of either or of both. He is not what a Christian can give to others. He is the gift of God to both. If he 'is peace' (2:14), then he is by nature a social, even a political event, which marks the overcoming and ending of barriers however deeply founded and highly constructed these appear to be" (M. Barth, *The Broken Wall: A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* [London: Collins, 1960] 39).

<sup>41</sup> There is great emphasis in the construction "he himself" (v. 14). At its very least it means that Christ himself is our peace, and perhaps "peace" (v. 14) could emphasize that it "is not only that the peace was made by Christ and ranks as His achievement, but that it is so identified with Him that were He away it would also fail, so dependent on Him that apart from Him we cannot have it. . . . [This feat was accomplished by making two groups one.] The sing. neut. [*hen*] (= one thing, one organism) expresses the idea of the *unity*, the new unity which the two long separate and antagonistic parties became" (Rader, *Church* 294).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> The Greeks were ethnocentric in their perception of other people in the world. If a man did not have the ability to speak Greek he was despised as a barbarian and subject to social and physical barriers in society. "When Aristotle is discussing bestiality, he says: It is found most frequently among barbarians, and by barbarians he simply meant non-Greeks" (Barclay, *Letters* 132).

This argument does not make Jesus guilty of ethnocide because he overrode Judaism or ignored the vast cultural variations of the Gentiles. He gave both something better. Without destroying what they possessed culturally, racially or linguistically, Christ gave every converted Jew and Gentile a new citizenship that enabled them to fellowship equally with one another in the Church while preserving their ethnicity to mingle among those in the world for the purpose of evangelism. Surely if Jesus, who is the head of the Church, provided a commonness for all men of conflicting cultures to enjoy mutual fellowship, there must be something to this “newness” that the Church is obligated to perpetuate. What Jesus initiated in the Church demands that there be visible unity regardless of race, language or culture. The world is steeped in prejudice and bigotry. When the Church is comprised of different classes and races living in equality and harmony, the world will take notice and the effect of Christ’s new commandment will begin to be realized.<sup>44</sup>

The “dividing wall,” which is mentioned exclusively here in the NT, has been interpreted in a number of different ways. One view identifies it as the wall in the temple at Jerusalem that separated the court of the Jews from the court of the Gentiles. This wall kept Gentile visitors away from Jewish worshipers and branded pagans as “those afar.” But this particular notion has a weakness in that contextually Paul does not make any reference to the Jerusalem temple.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore the wall separating the courts of the Jews and Gentiles may very well have been still standing when Ephesians was written or at least when Pentecost occurred in Acts 2.<sup>46</sup>

Another view is that Paul may have been referring to the curtain or veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place in the Jerusalem temple. According to Mark 15:38, at the hour of Christ’s death the curtain was completely torn. Hebrews 10:19–20 explicitly alludes to this access as a result of Christ’s death. Yet the inconsistency of calling a veil a “wall” makes this possibility unlikely.<sup>47</sup>

Another suggestion is that the rabbinic tradition of a “fence” around the Law is referred to here. That is, this partition is a “hedge” around old Israel, a reference to Isa 5:2. It has the purpose of keeping the nation secluded from the rest of the world.<sup>48</sup> This teaching, however, referred more to the protection of the Law rather than to the hostility that is in this con-

<sup>44</sup> John 13:34–35. For a further discussion see C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1955) 370; B. Fong, *Our Mutual Responsibilities Toward One Another as Seen in the Context of Allēlōn* (thesis; Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978) 30–32; M. C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 202–211.

<sup>45</sup> Barth explains: “2:14–15 indicates that the wall was separating men from men (i.e. Gentiles from Jews), according to 2:16 the same wall means enmity between man (both Jew and Gentile) and God. The wall in the Temple, around Jerusalem, or around the Promised Land, therefore cannot exhaust what the author had in mind” (*Wall* 34).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* For an alternate view see Abbott, *Commentary* 61. Also see Measly, *Studies* 79.

<sup>47</sup> Rader, *Church* 294.

<sup>48</sup> Rader explains the meaning behind this perspective of the barrier: “What Paul really expresses then is the fact that the legal system, which was meant primarily to protect the Jewish people against the corruption of heathen idolatry, became the bitter root of Jewish exclusiveness

text. And it is a cumbersome and narrow explanation of what appears to be much more simple and broad.<sup>49</sup>

A fourth view suggests that the “dividing wall” does not refer to an actual physical barrier. Instead it appears to represent the enmity that exists between Jews and Gentiles.<sup>50</sup> What separated Jew and Gentile in history was far more than a physical barrier, and the admonition by the apostle for succeeding generations seems to include more than historical symbols. Those who become part of the community of Christians leave behind the hostile attitudes that now are nonessential issues in light of the newness found in Christ.<sup>51</sup>

The text gives a clear basis for discounting any reason for hostilities between people of different races. Notice that since the “hostility” (Eph 2:15) is in antithesis to “peace” (v. 14), “hostility” should also be taken in an abstract sense. It seems to be between Jew and Gentile, not between God and man.<sup>52</sup> Consequently if the animosity has been destroyed by Christ, Jew and Gentile believers are forbidden to be hostile toward one another.

The reason for ending this enmity is now explained. The animosity between Jew and Gentile believers ended because of Christ’s physical death, which implies also the death of hostility between Jew and Gentile. Since the Jews preserved their segregation from Gentiles in an effort to abide by the Law, the removal of the Law’s presence would consequently remove the reason for separation. The Gentiles had no concern over the commandments and regulations, whereas the Jews meticulously obeyed them. This difference was like a wall between their lives. In this situation Jesus removed the wall, and hence Jewish-Gentile hostility was gone. It is also worth noting that the Law was not the enmity but was certainly the cause of it.<sup>53</sup>

Even though a Jew was still a Jew and a Gentile still a Gentile, they were also much more. Because of Christ they now shared something in common that was greater than their ethnicity.<sup>54</sup> Yet within the Church racial hostilities among human groups who share a greater spiritual affinity with

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in relation to the Gentiles. This is to give [*phragmou*] here the sense of something that fences in or encloses” (ibid.). For further discussion see Moule, *Studies* 79.

<sup>49</sup> Rader, *Church* 294.

<sup>50</sup> Hoehner, “Ephesians” 625.

<sup>51</sup> Paul’s use of “wall” reveals many meanings and thus likely includes many more realms than just religion. “Political and cosmic, moral and righteous, intellectual and psychological, physical and metaphysical distinctions and divisions must also be thought of when Eph. 2:14 is read. To put it in more modern terms: this verse says that Jesus Christ has to do with whatever divisions exist between races and nations, between science and morals, natural and legislated laws, primitive and progressive peoples, outsiders and insiders. The witness of Ephesians to Christ is that Christ has broken down every division and frontier between men. And even more, Ephesians adds that Christ has reconciled men with God!” (*Wall* 37).

<sup>52</sup> Salmond, “Epistle” 295.

<sup>53</sup> Hoehner, “Ephesians” 626.

<sup>54</sup> Salmond explains: “What was contemplated, too, was not simply the making of *one man* [*hena anthrōpon*] where formerly there were two, but the making of *one new* [*kainou*] man” (“Epistle” 296). It is this newness that brings all Christians into a oneness of relationships. In addition to the animosity being removed a new order of Christian person is formed.

one another are still heated and show little evidence of abating. The ugliness of human bigotry is clear. Manmade taboos are designed to keep a psychological and sociological distance between groups. Especially when a narrow geographical area exists with members of at least two groups intermingling, law and custom arise to keep them separate. Along with the segregation comes stereotyped thinking, mistrust and scapegoating. The solution for some is to say that there is no significance at all to racial, cultural or linguistic differences. In the "new man," they argue, Jews cease to be Jews and Gentiles are no longer Gentiles. Yet racial, cultural and linguistic distinctions obviously continue after conversion.<sup>55</sup> Something was destroyed by Christ's death—but what was it? Certainly something significant ended. What it was is clearly evident in his purpose for dying.

Christ had two reasons for ending the hostility. First, he wanted to make peace. He did so by making one new man out of the two. The "newness" of this "new man" is not a reference to recent time (*neos*) but rather to a freshness in character or quality (*kainon*). It would be appropriate to describe this "new man" as a "new creation"<sup>56</sup> or "one body" as is done in v. 16, referring to the Church. In Christ's Church Jews do not become Gentiles nor do Gentiles become Jews. Instead both Gentiles and Jews become believers, Christians, a new creation.

Second, Christ destroyed the enmity in order that he could reconcile both Jew and Gentile believers to himself in one body. By his death on the cross he killed the enmity that existed between God and men. As he was put to death, he put to death Jewish-Gentile hostility. Reconciliation with God is now a fact, but within the context of the already accomplished reconciliation of Jew and Gentile.<sup>57</sup> Thus in v. 14 reconciliation happened between Jew and Gentile, and in v. 16 God and man are reconciled. It is also from this text that the term "reconciliation" is elucidated. It has a special emphasis—namely, the removal of enmity.<sup>58</sup>

There is a clear grammatical link between vv. 14 and 17. Verse 17 begins with an untranslated "and" (*kai*). In particular the text indicates not only that Christ is "our peace" but also that he preached peace. "Not only did Christ effect the reconciliation, but He also came and preached the glad tidings of it, and that not to one class but to both."<sup>59</sup> A mystery is apparent at this point, for Christ preached almost exclusively to Jews. But it is probable that this is a reference to the apostles' preaching, since these "sent ones" were appointed by Christ and given the message to preach by him as well. Also the message of peace was based upon Christ's death, not his life on

<sup>55</sup> Rader, *Church* 252

<sup>56</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17. For discussion see C. Hodge, *An Exposition of 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Wilmington: Sovereign Grace, 1972) 280–281; J. H. Bernard, "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians," *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (ed. Nicoll) 71–72.

<sup>57</sup> Barclay explains: "The work of Jesus is to show all men that God is their friend, and because God is their friend, that they must be friends with each other. Reconciliation with God involves and necessitates reconciliation with man" (*Letters* 137).

<sup>58</sup> Barclay observes: "He had first to kill this enmity between the two before He could bring them both into right relations to God in the way indicated, viz., in one body, as one great, united whole" (*ibid.*).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

earth. Jew and Gentile alike receive this peace. Gentiles are described as those “who were far away” (v. 17) since they were without a Messiah and alienated from Israel’s covenants. Jews are those who “were near” (v. 17)—that is, their covenants and Law put them in closer proximity to God from a relationship standpoint.

With possession of peace, all believers enjoy a benefit of “access” (v. 18) to the Father. Some consider this “access” to be an introduction, but the context indicates instead that Christ gives believers access. Thus believers, whether Jew or Gentile, can approach the Father through the Holy Spirit because Christ’s work on the cross achieved reconciliation.

These amazing spiritual advantages make one wonder why racial hostility has been a factor in Church history. For the faith outlined thus far should have been perceived as something much stronger than bonds of race and culture and language. Yet it is worthy to note that since the time of Constantine, Christianity was assumed to be a birthright. Therefore it was difficult to accept a Jew or Turk as a real believer. Rader observes that the “factor of natural heritage was regarded as more important than the factor of common faith.”<sup>60</sup>

The union of Jew and Gentile is emphasized in several ways. In v. 14 it is stated that “the two” are made “one.” In v. 15 the “one new man” is created “out of the two.” Then in v. 16 “in this one body . . . both” are reconciled. And finally “both” have equal priority to enjoy access by the Spirit into the Father’s presence. The oneness that derives from the redemptive work of Christ challenges many of the limits observed in Christian circles. Christian fellowships that segregate groups due to sex, race or economic status should be reevaluated in light of the Ephesians 2 principle. The peace that Christ brought must result in a new man that challenges previous schemes of insiders and outsiders and brings mutual acceptance of one another. A history of selectivity should be replaced by oneness in Christ, and a new history of brotherhood and inclusiveness should be displayed.<sup>61</sup>

### III. THE UNION THAT CHRIST ESTABLISHED FOR JEW AND GENTILE HAS SPECIFIC CONSEQUENCES (EPH 2:19–22)

As a result of Christ’s unifying work, Gentiles can shed the stigma of being foreigners and aliens. Believing Gentiles become “fellow citizens with

<sup>60</sup> Rader, *Church* 250.

<sup>61</sup> Barth understands that Eph 2:13–14 even prohibits typical church gatherings distinguished by gender, race and class, stating that they are “nothing less than a repudiation of Christ. When no tensions are confronted and overcome, because insiders or outsiders of a certain class or group meet happily among themselves, then the one new thing, peace, and the one new man created by Christ, are missing; then no faith, no church, no Christ is found or confessed. For if the attribute ‘Christian’ can be given sense from Eph. 2, then it means reconciled and reconciling, triumphant over walls and removing the debris, showing solidarity with the ‘enemy’ and promoting not one’s own peace of mind, but ‘our peace.’ If preaching the Gospel (evangelizing) is what its name suggests, then it is exactly the same as it was in Galilee, on Golgotha, and in the apostolic Church after Pentecost: ‘He came and proclaimed peace to those who are far and peace to those near’ (2:17)” (*Wall* 39).

God's people and members of God's household." They join in the company of all who are the redeemed.<sup>62</sup> This new man that Christ created, however, does not necessarily mean that the Church inherits all of Israel's blessings.

Three observations are pertinent to this point. (1) The new union was not a blending of Gentiles into Jews. Both groups formed a new humanity. (2) The language of the text is specific. Gentiles were incorporated "with God's people" and are in "God's household." The name "Israel" is not used. (3) It was at Pentecost that the "one new man" began. This is clear from the fact that the new union is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (v. 20). The Gentiles become a part of the redeemed of all ages. Their entrance into the one new man is not begun in the OT but at Pentecost.<sup>63</sup> This "new creation" or "new humanity" that Christ established for people of all ethnic groups is described as a building, a holy temple in which God dwells, an OT figure. The building is described in three parts: foundation, formation, function.

Fellow citizenship can be claimed by Gentiles because they are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Since the term "prophets" follows "apostles," it is likely that these individuals are of the NT era, not the OT. Notice that this sequential pattern is repeated in Eph 3:5; 4:11. Very likely these NT prophets received the mystery of the Church in the post-Christ days, a mystery that was hidden in the past.<sup>64</sup>

There are several possibilities in interpreting the phrase "the foundation of the apostles and prophets." It could mean that the foundation of the Church was built by them. Or it could mean that these individuals were the source from which the Church originated. It could also mean that the foundation was owned by them. But most likely it appears that these individuals themselves were the foundation. This choice is substantiated by a comparison with 4:11 where the apostles and prophets were gifted people given to the Church as its "foundation." Also, since Christ himself was the chief cornerstone<sup>65</sup>—that is, part of the foundation—all of the apostles and prophets were to be aligned first with him. All other believers who are added to the Church follow suit and align their lives with Christ.<sup>66</sup>

It is clear from this text that segregation in the Church is an indefensible position. Genocide is an equally unacceptable extreme. Nor is there an allow-

<sup>62</sup> Those who are called "God's people," then, "are not the Jews, nor specially the patriarchs or Old Testament saints . . . as Chrysostom says, nor the angels, as some other commentators. Nor, again, does the word mean 'holy men of all times and places.' The word does not refer to personal holiness, but to membership of the spiritual commonwealth to which Jewish and Gentile Christians alike belong" (Abbott, *Commentary* 69).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Hoehner, "Ephesians" 626.

<sup>65</sup> Abbott makes an important point regarding the figure of Christ being the "chief cornerstone": "The figure of the corner-stone as uniting the two walls is pressed by Theodoret as referring to the union of Jews and Gentiles: and many expositors have followed him. But this is not only to press the figure unduly, it is also unsuitable. For the point is that Jews and Gentiles now indifferently are built into the one building, not as if the Jews were one wall and the Gentiles another" (*Commentary* 71).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

ance made for some kind of delayed post-salvation union with the new humanity. Instead, at the point of conversion there is a new level of spiritual being where all people with their differences are elevated into a common brotherhood. Therefore it seems highly contradictory to build churches on the principle of racial, cultural or linguistic differences and hope that they will later convert into the picture of unity that Christ completed at the cross.

Next, the formation of the superstructure on a firm foundation is laid out. The phrase “in Christ the whole building is joined together” emphasizes a single superstructure rather than its several parts. This singleness is emphasized further by Paul’s use of synecdoche.<sup>67</sup> There is no careless construction, but one that is planned and deliberate. “The image is that of an extensive pile of buildings in process of construction at different points on a common plan. The several parts are adjusted to each other so as to preserve the unity of design.”<sup>68</sup> This structure “rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.” Therefore as new people are converted they are included in the one superstructure, the one new man. Jew and Gentile alike are joined together into one organism. “That is what the church should be like. Its unity comes not from organization, or ritual, or liturgy, or worship. Its unity comes from Christ.”<sup>69</sup>

Lastly, the superstructure<sup>70</sup> designed by God has a specific function. As God places individual believers into the structure he is building a dwelling place for his Spirit to live in.<sup>71</sup> In the past God lived in the temple. His glory there represented his presence with the people. Now God lives in his new temple built not by the hands of men but by him, not with earthly materials but with living beings. The references to the Spirit indwelling individual believers<sup>72</sup> in Ephesians 2 seem to refer to the Spirit’s corporate “dwelling.” It is composed of all Jewish and Gentile believers. “Every believer has his own niche to fill.”<sup>73</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Before the Church adopts a philosophy that addresses the issue of race it must first examine and then articulate the NT foundation of the Church’s

<sup>67</sup> Bullinger explains: “*Synecdoche* of the whole is when the whole is put for a part. This is a closer connection than that of mere genus or species. It is when the one is not merely of the same kind as the other, but actually a part or member of it . . . the ‘whole building’ [*pasa oikodomē*], every being put for every part of it” (*Figures* 636).

<sup>68</sup> Abbott, *Commentary* 75

<sup>69</sup> Barclay, *Letters* 139.

<sup>70</sup> Moule elaborates on the significance of this structure illustration: “The idea is not of a completed but of a progressive work, a ‘framing together’ of the structure ever more closely and firmly. The building shrinks into greater solidity, binds itself into more intense coherence, as it grows” (*Studies* 85).

<sup>71</sup> Simpson and Bruce, *Commentary* 68.

<sup>72</sup> Rom 5:5; 8:9, 11; 1 Cor 2:12; Gal 3:2; 4:6; 1 John 3:24; 4:13. For discussion see J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1977) 164–165. Also see C. Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 135.

<sup>73</sup> Simpson and Bruce, *Commentary* 68.

existence. Included in that explanation of its existence are two essentials: unity and fellowship. More than pleasant expressions or hopeful ideals, they are basic to the gospel and are priorities for the Church. Along this line, several helpful observations can be made from any analysis of Eph 2:11–22.

First, this text deals with the concrete fellowship between Jew and Gentile in the Church. This union describes harmony without the elimination of differences. “Christianity was neither a Jewish sect nor a hellenistic cultic community but a *tertium quid*. It was organized as a voluntary fellowship without regard to the distinction of religion, race, class, nation, or gender, that divided the ancient world.”<sup>74</sup> When this text is compared to Gal 3:28, Col 3:11 and 1 Cor 12:13, unity with diversity is the emphasis that prevails. Any notion that Paul is describing a total dissolution of human distinctions among believers is extreme and not permissible. There is sufficient evidence that Paul continued to address specific groups as Jews, Gentiles, husbands, or wives to indicate this. But, granting differences, Paul is advocating a commonness among Christians, a reason for those who were once at odds with each other to now live together in mutual acceptance.<sup>75</sup>

Second, it is the visible unity of the Church that this text is emphasizing. Unity is a symptom of the reconciling work of God. On the one hand, if there is no reconciliation between Jew and Gentile then no reconciliation between man and God can be claimed. On the other hand, since reconciliation has been accomplished, divine power has molded “all these incongruous elements into one consistent whole, stamped with one regenerate likeness.”<sup>76</sup>

Third, certainly if the intense hostility between Jew and Gentile was made impotent by the death of Christ it is presumptuous of the Church to cater to lesser sociological phenomena such as white versus all others, wealthy versus poor, or one caste versus another. The significance of displaying this genuine internal change is a part of the Church’s mission and purpose. This demonstration is essential to the gospel. Part of that proclamation is the display of oneness begun by Christ and carried out by his followers.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> J. Moltmann, “The Life Signs of the Spirit in the Fellowship Community of Christ,” *Hope for the Church: Moltmann in Dialogue with Practical Theology* (ed. T. Runyon; Nashville: Abingdon, 1979) 38.

<sup>75</sup> Barth explains this new humanity: “Abolition and peace—these great words will keep us from dreaming of, or scoffing at, a sexless, raceless, homeless, neuter superman, whom Christianity allegedly set out to promote or to produce. The words ‘neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free man, neither male nor female; you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; 1 Cor. 12:13) by which Paul describes Christ’s work, do by no means wipe out or deny distinctions between nations, sexes, classes, and occupations. Otherwise Paul would not have included in his letters special exhortations for Jews and Greeks (Rom. 2:17ff; 11:13ff), husbands and wives (Eph. 5:22ff; Col. 3:18ff), slaves and masters (Eph. 6:5ff), etc. But, faith in Christ, even Christ himself, means that the two—whatever their distinctions are—can and do live together: those who were formerly opposed, mutually exclusive, separated by what seemed to be an insurmountable wall. To say ‘Christ’ means to say community, co-existence, a new life, peace (2:14)” (*Wall* 38).

<sup>76</sup> Simpson and Bruce, *Commentary* 68.

<sup>77</sup> Paxson observes the vital nature of this public display of Christian reality in uniting people together: “Here is a oneness that is inward and vital. A new start has been made from a new

Fourth, if churches adopt the attitude that involvement in race relations will distract from its primary calling of preaching the gospel and observing the ordinances, then it has in fact denied the gospel, which is concerned with bringing peace. The peace that Christ provided affects every human dimension including national, social and economic boundaries.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, the Church of today must follow the early Church's example. It preached the gospel to Jew and Gentile. The early Church overcame the initial temptation to be only a Jewish sect.<sup>79</sup> Their fellowships demonstrated a visible unity, not an invisible one. This is demanded from the very nature of what it means to confess Christ. A true confession must mean to affirm the end of all division and hostility, separation and segregation, enmity and contempt, prejudice and bigotry. "It does no good to call Christ 'Lord, Lord' unless we mean by 'Christ' even this new man, the end of divisions, 'one new thing made of both,' 'one new man,' 'one body' instead of two which formerly were antagonists of God (2:14–16)."<sup>80</sup>

According to Eph 2:11–22 the Church must organize itself and operate with a priority of unity achieved through mutual acceptance. The Church was founded upon the basic principle that all dividing walls have been destroyed by Christ's death. They continue to exist in the non-Christian world, but among the fellowship of believers such distinctions have no place. The racial conflict between Jew and Gentile was notorious in its day. Nevertheless God, through the sacrifice of Jesus, overcame the enmity. That was a demonstration of the power of the gospel. And that same power is present in the Church today. "Only 'the immeasurable greatness of God's power,' exhibited in the resurrection of Christ, could break down 'the dividing wall of hostility' and unite Jew and Gentile 'in one body.' It was miraculous. So is the overcoming of the barriers of race and rank today."<sup>81</sup>

Proponents who advocate ethnic diversity as a basis for Church segregation claim to have a case when they assert that their ecclesiastical strategy causes greater growth results than the orthodox methods of Christian missions. But it is possible that the orthodox methods of Church history have not been completely faithful to the principle of visible unity described in Eph 2:11–22. Has the Church really lived up to its "newness" in Christ with the oneness of all people in the Church? What effect would the Church have on

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center. Here is no camouflage of a patched-up, man-made peace, but a divine reality in a positive brotherhood of goodwill and love, born out of true family relationship established by life in Christ" (*Wealth* 65).

<sup>78</sup> Barth notes: "When this peace is deprived of its social, national, or economic dimensions, when it is distorted or emasculated so much that only 'peace of mind' enjoyed by saintly individuals is left—then Jesus Christ is being flatly denied. To propose in the name of Christianity, neutrality or unconcern on questions of international, racial, or economic peace—this amounts to using Christ's name in vain. On the other hand, if true evangelism is carried out, it not only will involve *some* social action, but will be from beginning to end even that social, reconciling, uniting action with which Christ is identified when he is called 'our peace'" (*Wall* 40).

<sup>79</sup> I am grateful to Ainslie Walton of the University of Aberdeen for this idea.

<sup>80</sup> Barth, *Wall* 38.

<sup>81</sup> Stott, *Our Guilty Silence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 75.

the world if in great contrast to the habit of racial segregation congregations displayed a unity of its members from all different backgrounds sharing in common worship around the table of communion? Would not the world, which sees no possible solution to the race problems, sit up and take note? Would they not ask how the Church manages such a feat? And would not the Church then have the opportunity of pointing the world to Christ?