

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XXV : VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL RECONCILIATION (2:11-22)

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. for through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (KJV)

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands) — remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (NIV)

Wherefore, remember, that ye [were] once the nations in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that called Circumcision in the flesh made by hands, that ye were at that time apart from Christ, having been alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope, and without God, in the world; and now, in Christ Jesus, ye being once afar off became nigh in the blood of the Christ, for he is our peace, who did make both one, and the middle wall of the enclosure did break down, the enmity in his flesh, the law of the commands in ordinances having done away, that the two he might create in himself into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile both in one body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity in it, and having come, he did proclaim good news — peace to you — the far-off and the nigh, because through him we have the access — we both — in one Spirit unto the Father. Then, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being chief corner-[stone], in whom all the building fitly framed together doth increase to an holy sanctuary in the Lord, in whom also ye are builded together, for a habitation of God in the Spirit. (Young’s Literal Translation)

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS — “If Jews were God’s chosen people and Gentiles were not, and if Gentile Christians were not Jews and yet the elect of God (1.4f), what were they? Did they form a new group distinct from Gentiles and also from both Jews and Jewish Christians and, if so, how should that group be categorized? If Jews and Gentiles are equal in Christ, do Gentile Christians take over some or all of the privileges and responsibilities of Jews? These are the kind of questions which lie behind 2.11-22; yet because we know so little of the churches to which [Paul] wrote it is difficult to point to any actual situation in them which may have led to the raising of these questions.... From another angle we may say that while 2.1-10 was narrative in dealing with the redemption of the individual, 2.11-22 might be categorized as narrative recounting what happened to a group, the Gentiles. This naturally launches us into a discussion of the nature of the church.” [Best, 235] Best later makes the observation that because of this recognition of three entities: the Jews, Gentiles and the combination of the two within the church, this is then true: “The church is then more than a reformed Judaism.” [Best, 236] Agreeing with that is a comment by Peter O’Brien, Vice Principal and Senior Research Fellow in New Testament, Moore Theological College, Sydney Australia: “[This] paragraph has been regarded as ‘perhaps the most significant ecclesiological text in the New Testament.’” [O’Brien, 183]

OVERVIEW

This portion of scripture readily divides into three sections: vv. 11-13, 14-18, and 19-22:

Text

Observations

¹¹ Therefore remember that **you**, once Gentiles in the flesh — who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands — ¹² that at that time **you** were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from 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.

- note the use of “you”
- Original Position of the Gentile Christians
- the contrast lies between the Jews and Gentiles
- lays the foundation for the reader’s present privileges by reminding them of their past

¹⁴ For He Himself is **our** peace, who has made **both** one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them **both** to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE AFAR OFF AND TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR. ¹⁸ For through Him **we both** have access by one Spirit to the Father.

- note the use of “we” or “us” with God as subject
- Bridge: Discussion on the Reconciliation of the Gentiles with Jewish Christians
- contrast lies between non-membership of the Jewish people and Christianity
- gives further explanation of how this “coming near” was made possible by Christ’s work

¹⁹ Now, therefore, **you** are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom **you** also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (NKJV)

- note the use of “you”
- Present Position of Gentile Christians
- the contrast lies between the Gentiles’ original position outside of God’s people with their present position
- summarizes by noting the great privileges of being united together in local churches

Here is Paul’s ‘flow of thought’ for these three sections:

command to Gentile Christians to remember their former position ...

¹¹ Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh —

a further defining of the Gentiles as considered by the Jews

who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands —

... continuing in the original command to “remember”

¹² that at that time you were

- without Christ,
- being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and
- strangers from the covenants of promise,
- having no hope and
- without God in the world.

contrast with the Gentile Christians’ past with their present position

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

emphatic statement of Christ not “making” peace but “is” our peace!

¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace,

explanation of how Jesus Christ is our peace

- who has made both **[Jewish and Gentile believers]** one **[new humanity]**,
- and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

further defining how “the dividing wall of hostility” was broken down

¹⁵ *having abolished [by nullifying, by rendering ineffective] in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances,*

purpose clause

so as to create

- *in Himself one new man [the new humanity] from the two, [Jewish and Gentile believers] thus making peace, [horizontal peace between Jew and Gentile]*
- ¹⁶ *and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body [the local assembly, the local church] through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. [vertical peace between both Jewish and Gentile believers with God]*

OT scripture support from Isaiah 57:19

¹⁷ *And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.*

application of OT scripture reference to the Jewish and Gentile Christians

¹⁸ *For through Him we both have access [freedom, or right to enter] by one [Holy] Spirit to the Father.*

Paul draws a conclusion from the proceeding argument, using four metaphors as illustration

¹⁹ *Now, therefore, [consequently]*

imagery: the STATE —

you are no longer strangers and foreigners, [negative]

but fellow citizens [positive]

with the saints [‘holy ones’, possibly angels but probably all believers, living and dead]

imagery: the FAMILY —

and members of the household of God,

imagery: a BUILDING —

²⁰ *having been built on the foundation of the apostles and [NT] prophets,*

Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, [unique, set apart from the foundation and building material]

imagery: a TEMPLE —

²¹ *in whom the whole building, being fitted together, [present tense: ‘continually being fitted together’] grows [present tense: ‘continually growing’] into a holy temple [the inner sanctuary, the ‘naon’, not the general word for temple, ‘hieron’] in the Lord,*

parallel sentence which further identifies this temple as the dwelling place of God

²² *in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the [Holy] Spirit.*

SALVATION RECONCILES BOTH VERTICALLY AND HORIZONTALLY — *“The discussion unveils a new aspect of the work of Christ: the reconciliation of people not only to God but also to one another. Salvation is more than believers receiving the forgiveness of their sins, deliverance from the grip of the powers, adoption as children of God, and union with Christ in resurrection and exaltation. Salvation means union with one another.” [Best, 235] This is speaking to us as believers within our own local body. It is one thing to say we have ‘peace’ with some ‘mystical body’, some spiritual unity with unseen believers whom we never have to confront. It is quite another thing to deal with real live people face-to-face, day after day, year after year. It is that kind of local body to which Paul is addressing these comments. “This paragraph provides one of the most wonderful descriptions of peace and reconciliation within the Pauline letters. Here both the horizontal and vertical dimensions to this central salvation blessing are treated within the framework of God’s saving plan. Further, the centre-piece of this comprehensive reconciliation, and the fundamental theological undergirding of the whole letter, is to be found in vv. 14-18, where believers ‘come near’ to God and to one another (Gentiles and Jews) through the saving death of the Lord Jesus Christ.” [O’Brien, 182]*

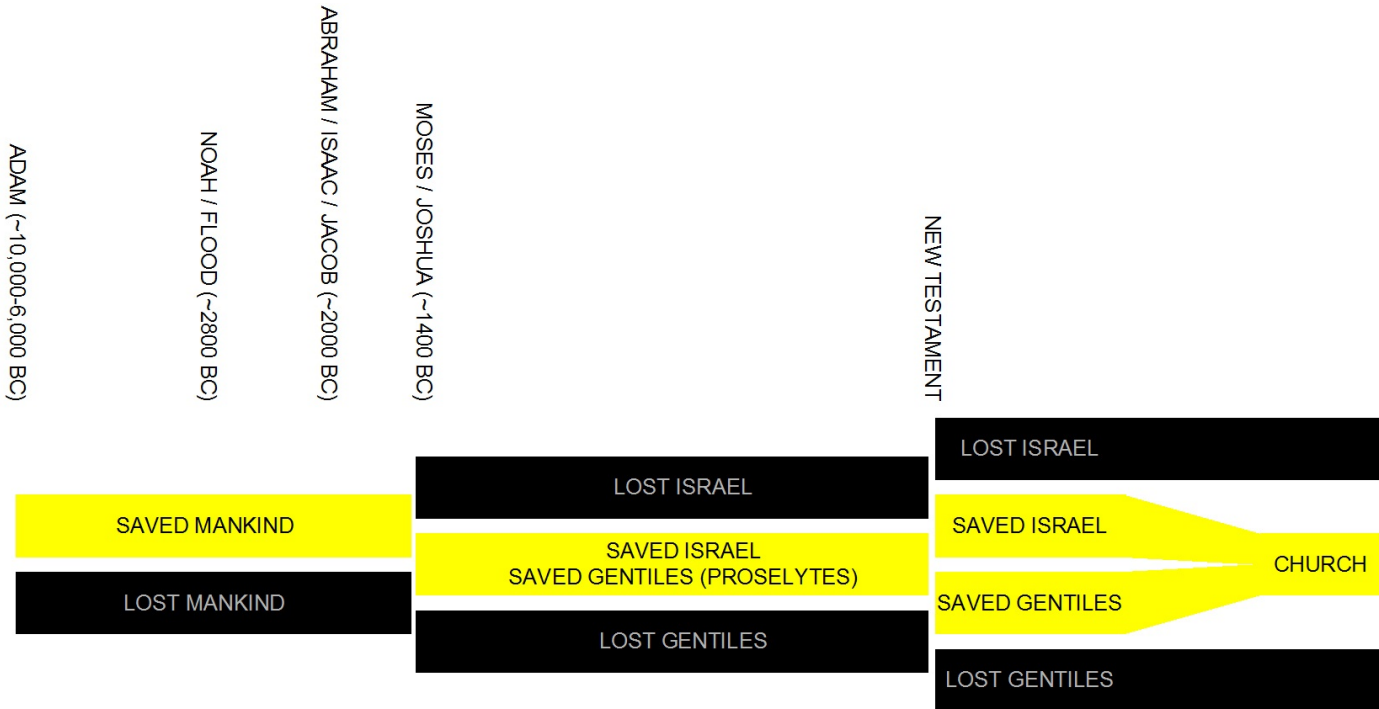
THE CHURCH: MICROCOSM OF THE NEW HUMANITY

— “Recent attempts ... to find some particular epistolary or rhetorical setting where there were problems between Jewish and Gentile Christians have not been convincing. The failure of recent writers to come up with plausible suggestions simply underscores the point already made, that *Ephesians is probably a circular letter*

mi-cro-cosm [mahy-kruh-koz-uhm] – noun – a little world; a world in miniature; human beings, humanity, society, or the like, viewed as an epitome or miniature of the world or universe

written to several congregations in Paul's Gentile mission where his predominantly Gentile readers are helped to appreciate the greatness of their salvation. It has a history, and they have entered into the heritage of Israel. The use of the Old Testament Scriptures in this key paragraph, both explicitly (cf. vv. 13, 17) and by way of allusion or echo (cf. vv. 19-22), underscores the note of continuity between Gentile Christians and the promises of God to Israel (cf. Gen 12:1-3; Isa 49:5, 6). But, if anything, there is a greater emphasis in this paragraph on the element of discontinuity: the new community of which these Gentiles have become a part is not simply a development out of Israel. It is a new creation (v. 15), not some kind of amalgam made out of the best elements of Israel and the Gentiles. The resulting new humanity transcends the two old entities, even though unbelieving Israel and disobedient Gentiles continue to exist. The privileges Gentiles enjoy are based upon but transcend the blessings promised to Israel (vv. 19-22)." [O'Brien, 183f]

a·mal·gam [uh-mal-guhm] – noun – an alloy of mercury with another metal or metals; a mixture or combination: *His character is a strange amalgam of contradictory traits.*



DID GOD ACCOMPLISH HIS GOAL? — This is of course a rhetorical question because the Lord always accomplishes what He sets out to do. But to answer the question: ‘did God accomplish His goal?’ – *God’s purpose was accomplished so perfectly that we have little-to-no understanding how amazed the original hearers must have been when they first heard Paul’s letter to the Ephesian area being read. God was proposing what was then considered unthinkable: bringing the Jews and Gentiles together into one body. Yet it was accomplished to such a degree that we read this today and think nothing about the Jews and Gentiles being in a church body together. God said He would do it, and He did. “It is perhaps impossible in the nineteenth century of Christendom to realize fully what was the marvel in the first century of the full revelation of an equal welcome for all nations to the Messiah’s covenant. But the fact that it was then a marvel remains a matter of permanent Divine instruction.”* [Moule, 75] Let us look at some of the ancient attitudes:

- **GENTILE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE JEWS** — *“The addressees are first identified physically as of Gentile birth. Left to themselves Gentiles would never have classified themselves as Gentiles, though they might have distinguished between themselves and barbarians or between nationalities. In their eyes Jews were simply one more race or nation. Only encounter with Jews would have made them aware of Jewish feeling on Gentile identity.... As presented here the framework is historical, the relation of Jews and Gentiles. Relations between them were never easy; Jews were proud to be God’s people; Gentiles looked askance [‘with suspicion, mistrust, or disapproval’] at their curious ways.”* [Best, 238, 235]
- **JEWISH ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE GENTILES** — *“The privileges now enjoyed by Gentile believers in Christ would be appreciated all the more gratefully if they bore in mind the state of life from which they had been delivered. The pious Jew was ever conscious of the privileges which he had inherited: daily he thanked God that he had not been made a Gentile. To him and to his people the true God had revealed himself in a unique manner: he had ‘not dealt thus with any other nation’; no other nation ‘knew his ordinances’ (Ps 147:20).”* [Bruce, 292f]
- **THE WORD ‘GENTILE’ ITSELF POINTS TO THEM AS ‘THE REST, THE OTHERS’** — Gentiles = lit. ‘the nations’; Heb., haggōyīm; the races outside of Israel. *“Some precepts of the Talmud (though much later, in their collected form, than St Paul’s day,) are fair illustrations: ‘It is forbidden to give good advice to a Gentile;’ ‘it is*

forbidden to cure idolaters, even for pay; except on account of fear;’ ‘he that steals from a Gentile is only to pay the principal; for it is said, He shall pay double unto his neighbor.’ [Moule, 75]

“There is ... a change in the way the contrast is presented from that of 2.1-3; it is no longer stressed as that between once a sinner and now saved, but between once a Gentile outside God’s people and now a Christian within that people.... *Few Christians today think of themselves as Gentiles but that should not lead us to think that those of [Paul’s] day were similarly unaware of their Gentile origin.*” [Best, 237]

APPENDIX A: Overview of Ephesians 2:11~22

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS BY ANDREW LINCOLN — “In the previous section, 2:1-10, [Paul] had reminded his Gentile Christian readers of the dramatic change God had brought about in raising them from spiritual death to new life in Christ. This is now followed by a further reminder of the change in their situation, the reversal of their former status as deprived Gentiles in comparison to Israel in favor of the privileges they now enjoy in their relationship to God and as members of his people. Again, the contrast of the pre-Christian past (‘then’) with the Christian present (‘now’) helps to shape the passage, which falls into three main parts. Verses 11-13 set out the reminder in terms of an initial contrast between the Gentiles’ former alienation from Israel and her God and their now having come near. Verses 14-18 then adapt a hymn to Christ as bringer of cosmic peace and make use of a combination of Isa 57:19 and Isa 52:7 in order to explain how Christ, through his work of reconciliation, accomplished this change for the Gentiles. Verses 19-22 complete the section, as v 19 summarizes and elaborates on the earlier contrast and leads into a depiction of the Church and the Gentiles’ part in it in terms of building and temple imagery in vv 20-22.

“As the passage begins, the readers, here explicitly described for the first time as Gentiles, are reminded by [Paul] that their pre-Christian state was one of serious religious deprivation. They are asked to reflect on their former condition in terms of categories valid at a prior stage in the history of salvation in order to appreciate all the more their present privileges. It is obviously [Paul’s] view that at one time Israel had real advantages and that Gentiles, in comparison, had at that time no share in Israel’s Messiah. Being excluded from God’s electing purpose for the commonwealth of Israel, from the covenant relationship and the promise, they were therefore destitute of the true hope and true God. The dramatic reversal that has taken place for the Gentile readers through their relationship to Christ and through his sacrificial death is described in the language of Jewish proselytism as ‘having come near.’ But at the rest of the passage makes clear, this terminology is transformed to mean not membership within Israel, but access to God himself and membership in his newly created community.

“The middle section of the pericope elaborates on how Christ’s work made this possible. The proselyte terminology of ‘far’ and ‘near’ reminds [Paul] of an OT passage, Isa 57:19, which speaks of peace for two such groups. Yet before he draws on this, he prepares the ground for its emphasis on peace by applying hymnic material depicting Christ as the embodiment of peace and bringer of reconciliation for a divided cosmos to the situation of a divided humanity. Christ is now said to have made Jews and Gentiles one by demolishing the dividing wall and source of hostility between them, that is, by abolishing the law and all its regulations, and to have accomplished this through his death. That death not only terminated the old order dominated by the law but introduced in its place a new creation, a corporate new humanity (‘one new person’) which is embraced in his own person. Two aspects of Christ’s reconciling work are now set forth. On the horizontal level, he has made peace between the two old enemies, Jews and Gentiles, and reconciled them in the one body of the Church. At the same time, on the vertical level, he has reconciled both groups to God through his death on the cross, indicating, in a way which the opening verses did not, that there is a fundamental sense in which Israel too was alienated from God. [Paul] is now able to introduce the OT citation which the earlier proselyte terminology recalled; he combines it creatively with Isa 52:7 to give a Christological interpretation, as Christ’s work on the cross is seen as his proclamation of peace with God to both the Gentiles readers and the Jews. The elaboration on Christ’s work concludes with a statement encapsulating the results of Christ’s peacemaking in terms of the access he has provided to the Father for both Jews and Gentiles through the one Spirit.” [Lincoln, 159f]