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# The Summation of All Things in Christ

## Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

### LESSON XIII : THE LOCAL CHURCH IN EPHESIANS 2 (2:11-22)

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**LAYING THE GROUNDWORK** — Prior to beginning this evening I wanted to give an introduction so everyone would know the perspective of this evening's lesson. A couple points I would like to make as we open:

● **ALL BELIEVERS IN THIS ROOM BELIEVE IN TWO DISTINCT ENTITIES: THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE MYSTICAL UNION OF ALL BELIEVERS** — To define the 'local church' – by that I mean *the physical gathering of believers in covenant with one another to carry out the purposes of Christ*; in other words, all those belonging to a single congregation of believers. Each one of these congregations make up a single body of believers, independent from all other bodies of believers, and there are therefore thousands upon thousands of these bodies on earth at this time. It is called 'local' in the sense that it is located in one place (a single congregation) rather than a world-wide institution such as the Catholic Church (which is actually one single church with extensions meeting in various places world-wide) or the 'universal invisible church' (which is said to be the mystical union of all believers everywhere).

● **I DO NOT BELIEVE THE 'MYSTICAL UNION OF ALL BELIEVERS' SHOULD BE REFERRED TO AS THE 'UNIVERSAL INVISIBLE CHURCH'** — All protestant denominations and even many Baptist congregations teach that the word 'church' means 'a called-out gathering' and that the 'true church' is the spiritual, mystical union of all believers of which one becomes a member when they are saved and thus 'baptized spiritually' into the 'universal invisible church'. I disagree with that definition. Allow me to quote a paragraph from the first lesson of this series on Ephesians:

“In its most basic sense, *ecclesia* [the Greek word translated 'church'] may be defined as follows: ***Originally an assembly of citizens, regularly summoned.*** [Vincent, *Word Studies*] The ancient Greek nation was composed of a number of small city-states embracing usually but a few thousand inhabitants. It was governed by the qualified citizens; i.e. they were autonomous and democratic. Not all the inhabitants however possessed the rights of citizenship (in some cases scarcely half) so the matter of qualification was quite important. This body of citizens *called-out* to assemble and discuss civic affairs was a Greek *ecclesia* (a NT example of that may be found in Acts 19). Therefore when the Lord Jesus used this word, He used it in the sense commonly understood by those with whom He was talking. In essence what Jesus said was this: *The Greek Gentiles have their assemblies which regularly meet to discuss things of a secular nature. I too will start and build My own ecclesia, an assembly of believers which will meet on a regular basis, not to discuss secular matters nor for social purposes but to honor and glorify My name. This assembly will be built using you apostles as the foundation (it is with you I will begin) and hell itself will not destroy this program — when I return, there will still be those assemblies meeting for My name's sake.* **Thus during His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ started a work which continues to this day.**”

The reader is referred to the first lesson for further details as to the meaning of the Greek word 'ecclesia' and how our word 'church' came to be used in reference to that NT assembly.

● **'CHURCH' IS A VERY POOR TRANSLATION OF THE GREEK WORD 'ECCLESIA'** — Here is a quote from Fenton John Anthony Hort that I find interesting because while the 'local church' teaching is definitely a Baptist distinctive, no one could be further from a Baptist than Dr. Hort. F. J. A. Hort delivered a series of lectures at Cambridge in 1888 / 1889 which were compiled and published in a book, *The Christian Ecclesia – A Course of Lectures on the Early History and Early Conceptions of the Ecclesia* [printed Macmillan and Co., LTD, New York, 1898]. This was his opening statement to those lectures:

“The reason why I have chosen the term *Ecclesia* is simply to avoid ambiguity. The English term *church*, now the most familiar representative of *ecclesia* to most of us, carries with it associations derived from the institutions and doctrines of later times, and thus cannot at present without a constant mental effort be made to convey the full and exact force which originally belonged to *ecclesia*.”

● **I RECOGNIZE THE FUTURE GATHERING OF SAINTS COULD BE REFERRED TO AS THE 'GLORY CHURCH'** — The term 'glory church' or 'church in glory' is a phrase lifted from the Baptist pastor and theologian B. H. Carroll. While some Baptists may take Bro Carroll to task for that terminology, I agree with Bro Carroll on this point. As mentioned above, the term 'ecclesia' means 'an organized assembly gathered for a distinct purpose' and for here and now, the only true representation of a NT 'ecclesia' is Christians who gather in the name of Christ, organized to carry forth His commands. But in eternity future when all the saints who will ever be saved will be gathered, they too will fit the definition of 'ecclesia' – they will be an assembly gathered for a distinct purpose. At that point it would constitute what some call today the 'universal-invisible church' but it must be remembered: this gathering is yet future. For here and now (and the DEFINITE thrust of the New Testament), the only representation of the 'ecclesia' are local congregations meeting to worship and serve our Lord.

● **WHAT PRACTICAL APPLICATION MIGHT WE MAKE CONCERNING THESE TWO ENTITIES?** — There was a time years ago, especially when I first came to accept what I now believe about the 'ecclesia', that I would get fairly upset whenever anyone would speak of the 'universal-invisible church'. After years of believing in the 'local church' however, I have

come to understand *many of our differences is merely a matter of semantics and not worth the division it causes between believers*. After all, we all believe in the ‘mystical union of all believers’; the difference is some would call that mystical union the ‘universal-invisible church’ while I believe it would more proper to call it the ‘family of God’. ***The important thing in my mind is this: practically speaking, is there a strong emphasis upon the local church or is church life ignored?*** I have known ‘universal-church’ people who place great importance on being an active member of a local church. I have also known strong, staunch ‘local church’ Baptists who in reality have little regard for their own church. Therefore, while I would definitely place a strong emphasis upon theology and doctrine, I also see the importance of the practical application of those doctrines coupled with love and grace for those who may not see it exactly as I do.

● **ONE REASON WHY SOME REJECT THE ‘LOCAL CHURCH’** — This ‘local church’ teaching is definitely a minority view and one reason for that is just the vast influence of the Protestants upon theology and writing. But even when one is exposed to the local church teaching, many times it is rejected without investigation or careful thought. Probably many reasons could be given for that but I believe one reason is because of ***the manner by which it is often presented by some Baptists***. I have sat under Baptist pastors who believe the most important doctrine in the NT is the ‘church’ and they will hardly preach a message without some reference to the ‘local church’ (and make no mistake about it, by ‘local church’ they mean ‘Baptists’ ... not all Baptists but just *their* kind of Baptists). There are tracts tracing the Baptists back to the days of the NT in a chain-link type fashion, demanding no one is a ‘true NT church’ if they cannot so trace their roots. There are some local church Baptists who carry this throughout eternity, teaching only Baptists will be the ‘true bride of Christ’ while all those who were not a Baptist here on earth will forever be the ‘friend of the bride.’ I ask, ***is that ‘Baptist Bride’ or ‘Baptist Pride’?*** I believe such extreme views on this doctrine pushes people away from a ‘local church’ interpretation of the scriptures. Brethren, in my opinion (and I fully recognize I could be wrong), ***I believe the emphasis should be on the importance of attending and supporting (with our presence, our attitudes, our finances, our talents, our love and concern for others in the church) our own local body of believers. When one slips into making it an issue of ‘we are the only ones’ or ‘God looks upon us with a little more favor than He looks upon others’ then the teaching has left the spirituality of the scriptures and entered into the carnality of our own fallen human natures.***



● **WE ALL VIEW THESE VERSES WITH OUR OWN PRE-CONCEIVED NOTIONS** — I freely admit I am looking at these verses through a local-church interpretation. Although I do not perhaps like that I may be ‘reading into the text,’ I admit it for this reason: *many, many others come to these verses with the pre-conceived notion that it refers to a ‘universal-invisible church’!* Hopefully by recognizing *both* of us are so doing, perhaps we may *both* be able to take a step back and try to view these verses as Paul (or more properly, the Holy Spirit *through* Paul) originally intended them.

● **OVERVIEW** — as we can see, one of the main reasons for this portion of scripture is to point to the Jews and Gentiles being equally united in one body, in one congregation:

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh,

who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands —

<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time:

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

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace,

- ***who did make both groups into one***
- and did break down the dividing wall of hostility,
  - <sup>15</sup> by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances,

***so that, in order that***

- ***in Himself He might make the two into one new man***, thus establishing peace,
- <sup>16</sup> ***and might reconcile them both in one body*** to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

<sup>17</sup> AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;

<sup>18</sup> for through Him we both have our access by one Spirit to the Father.

<sup>19</sup> *So then ... [CONSEQUENTLY, THEREFORE]*

**imagery: the STATE** —

you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens  
with the saints,

**imagery: the FAMILY** —

and are members of God's household,

**imagery: a BUILDING** —

<sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,  
Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

**imagery: a TEMPLE** —

<sup>21</sup> *in whom* the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

<sup>22</sup> *in whom* you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

## ● THE CHURCH IS A 'NEW ENTITY'

*"by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, in order that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace" – v15*

*"Paul refers to a whole new race that is formed. A new race that is raceless! This coincides with Paul's admonition not to offend three groups of people: the Jews, the Greeks / Gentiles, and the church of God (1 Cor 10:32). The Jews and the Greeks / Gentiles are presented as unconverted and the church is that which is composed of Jewish and Gentile believers. They are not Jews or Gentiles but a body of Christians who make up the church." [Hoehner, 379f]*

*"Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor 10:32)*

*"Removing the enmity by abolishing the law has cleared the ground for something new. In fact, Christ's purpose was nothing less than a new creation. We have already encountered this motif in 2:10 where believers were seen as God's creation. Here Christ, particularly through his death, is seen as the creator of a new humanity.... [I]n this context the one new person stands for the new humanity seen as a corporate entity. Christ has created this corporate new person in himself; the new humanity is embraced in his own person.... This is a new creation (cf. Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17) which embodies, on a human level, that summing up of all things in unity which is part of this writer's perspective (cf. 1:10).... The separation of the Gentiles from Israel and her election was a cleft so deep that it took the creative act of Christ's death to fill it. Yet Christ has done more than simply to bring Gentiles into Israel's election. The 'new person' he has created transcends those categories. In its newness, it is not merely an amalgam of the old in which the best of Judaism and the best of Gentile aspirations have been combined. The two elements which were used in the creation have become totally transformed in the process. This is 'the third race' which is different from Jews and Gentiles." [Lincoln, 143f]*

*"And he came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near" – v17*

**PREACHING TO BOTH THE 'FAR' AND 'NEAR' REINFORCES THE CONCEPT THAT THE CHURCH IS A NEW ENTITY** — *"This verse reinforces the idea of the formation of an entirely new entity. Both the 'far' and 'near' hear the message of peace. If the Gentiles actually became Jews, then the near would not need the message of peace; rather those who were far away would enter into the fold of the near. On the contrary, the picture is that the 'near' also need a message of peace, and on acceptance they, with the Gentiles, enter the new fold, the church. It is the new humanity that is created." [Hoehner, 387]*

## ● THE CHURCH IS MORE THAN REFORMED JUDAISM

*"by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, in order that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace" – v15*

*"The new community of which the Gentiles have become a part is not simply a development out of Israel, according to this writer. Instead, it took a new creation to produce it (v 15). The resulting one new person replaces the two old entities — Israel and the Gentiles (v 15). The privileges the Gentiles now enjoy not only match those which Israel experienced previously, but go beyond them (cf. vv 19-22)." [Lincoln, 133f] "The church is then more than a reformed Judaism." [Best, 236]*

*"For He Himself is our peace, who did make both groups into one and did break down the dividing wall of hostility" –*

**“BOTH” = JEWISH AND GENTILE CHRISTIANS** — *“In the clause ‘who has made both one,’ ‘both’ and ‘one’ are in the neuter, denoting entities.... They have not just been brought into a mutual relationship, but have been made one in a unity where both are no longer what they previously were. In accomplishing this, Christ has transcended one of the fundamental divisions of the first-century world.”* [Lincoln, 140f] *“The two groups are not strictly Jews and Gentiles; it is Christians from both these groups who are made into the new group. Jews and Gentiles as such still exist as independent groups.”* [Best, 253]

*“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone”* – v20

**NOTE THE FOUNDATION OF THE ASSEMBLY (CHURCH) IS NOT ISRAEL** — *“The foundation is not of course the rock or ground on which the lowest stones or bricks are laid but the lowest level of the building on which the remainder rests. We might have expected AE to say that the foundation of the church was Israel rather than the apostles and prophets; in not doing so he indicates that the church is not just a simple continuation of Israel.”* [Best, 281]

*“and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.”* – v16

**THE CHURCH IS NOT THE CONTINUATION OF ISRAEL** — *“The church is new for it did not exist prior to Christ, but how new is new? Do we have a third group, consisting of neither Jews nor Gentiles, standing alongside both and yet different from both? Has a new people of God, contrasting with Israel the old people, come into existence? Have Gentile Christians been absorbed into Israel so that they continue it? What, in short, is the relation of the church to Israel?”* [Best, 267f] Ernest Best continues by listing the problems with considering the church as being incorporated within Israel:

- ✓ His view robs the newness (v. 15) of its newness and gravely diminishes the discontinuity before and after Christ if all that has happened is in effect a widening of the boundaries of Israel by the addition of Gentile believers.
- ✓ Both Jews and Gentiles are in need of saving grace (2.1-10); Gentiles who do not accept this remain outside the one new being or are not made into new people. What then of Jews who do not accept God’s saving grace? Do they have access to God (2.18) other than through Christ?
- ✓ Had Paul wished to suggest that Gentile believers became a part of historic Israel he would have made ‘nearness’ in 2.13 mean nearness to Israel.
- ✓ In the terms of 2.1-4 both Jews and Gentiles before they believed stood on the same level as transgressors of God’s will; both must be changed if both are to be redeemed.
- ✓ Paul must have known there were unbelieving Jews yet says nothing about them; this then means he saw them as a group distinct from both Christians and Gentiles.
- ✓ If Gentile Christians were absorbed into Israel they would come under the Torah, yet the Law has been abrogated for the church.

## ● IF THE CHURCH IS A ‘NEW ENTITY’ THEN HOW DOES THAT RECONCILE WITH A ‘UNIVERSAL-INVISIBLE CHURCH’ THAT HAS EXISTED SINCE ADAM?

By definition, the ‘universal-invisible church’ consists of all the saved, both on earth and in heaven, from the time of Adam until the last person to be saved. That being so, how can Paul here speak of the church as a ‘new entity’ and a ‘new humanity’. The reference here *must* be to an earthly institution limited by time and not eternity.

## ● THE ‘BUILDING’ WAS ‘BUILT’ PRIOR TO THE ADDITION OF NEW MEMBERS

*“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone”* – v20

built – ἐποικοδομηθέντες [epoikodomēthentes] *“The past tense signifies the existence of the building (= the church) prior to the addition to it of the readers, but does not indicate anything about when the church first came into being.”* [Best, 270] *“The metaphor of building is used in two distinct ways, statically, in depicting a group of people as an edifice, and dynamically, of the maturing of people in their faith. In the first case the implied subject of the erection of the edifice is God or Christ; in the second it may be either God or Christ, but is more usually believers who build up themselves or one another in conduct and faith. The image is used in 2.20-2 in the first way (cf. 1 Cor 3.9, 16) and in the second in 4.12, 16, 29 (cf 1 Cor 10.23; 14.4-20; 2 Cor 10.8; 12.19; 13.10; 1 Th 5.11).”* [Best, 280] *“The imagery at the beginning of v 20 involves the readers’ being depicted as bricks which have been built up in a building on top of a foundation (cf. also v 22). The aorist passive participle ἐποικοδομηθέντες [epoikodomēthentes], ‘having been built,’ indicates both that this being placed on a foundation has already occurred for the readers, presumably in their conversion-initiation, and that God is to be understood now as the one who has brought this about.”* [Lincoln, 152] I believe this would be in reference to the ‘church’ as an ‘institution’. For example, we might say Covenant Baptist Church was built on the foundation of the apostles and NT prophets, but our church did not exist for nearly 1900 years after the apostles lived. So I believe this is speaking of the ‘church’ as an institution which was created and built by our Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, each successive church being modeled after that first church.

## ● EACH TRUE CHURCH IS A MICROCOSM OF ETERNITY

*“and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.”* – v16

As we commented on Ephesians 1:10, the theme of the book of Ephesians is the reconciliation of the universe under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Therefore each local congregation is a little microcosm, a little picture of what heaven will be like one day. ***“The Church is not only the place of reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, it is also the place where reconciliation between humanity and God is experienced, where harmony between heaven and earth has been restored, and where access to the Father is enjoyed. The high God of heaven has chosen to make it his dwelling place on earth, and the Christ who has been exalted to heaven forms the crowning stone in its structure.*** The Church is where men and women experience a sense of being at home, of belonging, not only to one another in a unified humanity as fellow citizens, but also to God himself as part of his household or family. This new society is also a building, a temple, where humans are the building material which God the builder has already made into his dwelling place. No longer the literal temple in Jerusalem but the community of the Church is the focus for God’s presence in the world. The Church is already the temple in which God dwells.” [Lincoln, 162]

### ● **‘WHOLE’ COULD REFER TO ‘EACH SEVERAL BUILDING’ = LOCAL CHURCHES**

*“in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord” – v21*

“‘And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the (Greek, every) building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.’ (Eph 2:20,21) ... The Ephesian letter was probably an encyclical, intended to circulate among several churches. Then 2:21 has greater meaning if ‘all the’ (Gk., *pasa*) of the King James version yields to the American Standard’s ‘each several building.’ This more accurate translation implies that Paul was not writing about one vast universal church, but rather about many distinct, individual, ‘local’ churches. Then each church, in every century and in every land, may claim the first church as its divine pattern.” [S. E. Anderson, *The First Church*, pg 12f] “In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul says: ‘In whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.’ (Eph. 2:21,22 RV) Here are two distinct affirmations: First — each several building or particular assembly growth into a holy temple of the Lord. That is by itself it is a temple of the Lord. Second — What is true of each is true of the church at Ephesus, ‘In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.’ Just before this he had written of the church as an institution, or abstractly, in which Jew and Gentile are made into one. But the abstract become concrete in each several building.” [Carroll, *Ecclesia*, pg 12]

William Tyndale (1526) translated it like this: *“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners: [guests] but citizens with the saints, and of the household of God: and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the head cornerstone, in whom every building coupled together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are built together, and made an habitation for God in the spirit.”* (2:19-22)

F. F. Bruce admits it is understood by some as “every building” growing together to form one grand complex edifice, as though the reference were to a multiplicity of local churches making up the church universal. He adds and agrees that the local church is a complete structure in itself, a dwelling-place for the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:9-17). It must be noted however that as a universal church advocate, Bruce argues against the afore-mentioned local church interpretation. [Bruce, 307]

Lincoln argues for the reading “every building” but immediately adds that does not argue for a local church interpretation: “This does not mean, however, that the writer now has in view every building in the sense of every local congregation. Rather, in all probability, [every building] should be taken as a Hebraism which has affected Koine usage and be understood as ‘all the building’ or ‘the whole building.’ Here, as in the rest of the letter, the writer has the universal Church in mind.” [Lincoln, 156]

Ernest Best admits to this translation but argues against it since it would go against the theme of the ‘church’ in Ephesians, which Best states is a ‘universal-invisible church’ teaching (note Ernest Best also does not teach Paul wrote the book of Ephesians): “Nowhere else does AE [the author of Ephesians], unlike Paul, have individual communities (every building) in mind, least of all individual believers, but always the whole church.... It would in any case be a little absurd to think of apostles and prophets as foundations of individual communities.” [Best, 286] Again, note that while Best denies the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, he does admit Paul’s emphasis throughout the NT is upon the local church.

### ● **SOME ARGUE AGAINST CHRIST AS THE ‘CAPSTONE’ BECAUSE IT DOES NOT FIT WITH THEIR ‘UNIVERSAL-INVISIBLE CHURCH’ INTERPRETATION**

*“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord” – vv 20,21*

I find Ernest Best’s comments interesting on this point. Best argues for the meaning of the word to imply a “capstone” rather than “cornerstone” yet has difficulties aligning his view of v20 with the next verse. The problem is his universal church interpretation which is in the process of being built. But if the church is as yet incomplete, how can Christ be considered the capstone? This difficulty disappears if one takes a local church position and interprets v. 21 as the church *as an institution*. Ernest Best’s comments: “However, this solution to the meaning of the angle-stone is difficult in that it implies that the building is well on to completion for in the next verse the growth of the church is stressed; buildings do not grow up to stones above them. Has Christ moreover no place in the church until it is partly complete? Yet there must be a sense in which the church is already complete, for v. 22 says it is God’s dwelling-place; can he be envisaged as dwelling in an incomplete building?” [Best, 285f] I’m sure unknowingly but ***Ernest Best’s comments, definitely from a non-Baptist point-of-view, are strong arguments for a local church interpretation in this passage.***

Andrew Lincoln does a good job detailing the arguments for and against a ‘capstone’ interpretation. Here are some of his

comments on why the word ‘capstone’ would fit in this verse. Note his argument fits well with a ‘local-church’ interpretation with the picture being used here with the church as an institution being built by Christ: “The exalted position ascribed to Christ elsewhere in Ephesians and the special emphasis on Christ’s position as over against the rest of the structure in 2:20 favor this interpretation. As S. Hanson puts it, ‘He is not one of the stones in the foundation in common with the Apostles, even if He is a cornerstone, but He is the top stone of the pinnacle of the building.’ ... For the writer of Ephesians, the notion of a finished structure with Christ as its head is not at all incompatible with the dynamic imagery of growth. He views the Church as already Christ’s fullness (1:23) and yet at the same time as having to attain that fullness (4:13; cf. also 3:19). In 4:15, 16, the passage which repeats a number of the expressions found here in 2:20-22, the imagery is precisely that of a body growing up into Christ as the head. So here, on the one hand, the Church is pictured as a finished structure with Christ as the top stone, and yet, on the other hand, it must grow into a temple in him. On such a view, the relation of Christ to the apostles and prophets is not unclear. As in 4:7-16, they are in at the beginning of the Church, but Christ is the exalted Lord over all. They are foundational, but he is the keystone which crowns the whole building.” [Lincoln, 154ff]

## PRACTICAL

### ● CORPORATE WORSHIP IS IMPORTANT

*“for through Him we both have our access by one Spirit to the Father” – v18*

**THIS ‘ACCESS’ IS CORPORATE IN NATURE IN VERSE 18** — “The religious and philosophical systems of the ancient world offered different and unsatisfactory ways to God. *Access is not conceived here individualistically, every man his own priest, but is an access of the whole church comprising both Jews and Gentiles, an access experienced in worship.* Through their cultus Jews already had access, though of a limited nature; Gentiles had none; now both have the same free access.” [Best, 274]

*“in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord” – v21*

**THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH INVOLVEMENT** — **being joined together** — συναρμολογουμένη [sunarmologoumenē] “They need to be aware of the immensely privileged nature of their new situation. In Christ they are being built into the dwelling place of God himself. They are the bricks that are being built into God’s new temple (cf. also 1 Pet 2:5). Again, there is the need for a corporate awareness. The συν- [sun-] compound here indicates that this is more than an individual experience; the process of being formed into the Church has to take place in the company of fellow believers.” [Lincoln, 158]

### ● SALVATION RECONCILES BOTH VERTICALLY AND HORIZONTALLY

*“For He Himself is our peace, who did make both groups into one and did break down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, in order that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace” – vv 14,15*

*“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 which we never 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.

**so making peace,** — ποιῶν εἰρήνην [poiōn eirēnēn] “The creation of the new person takes place simultaneously with the making of peace (present participle, not necessarily signifying a continuous activity as if Christ keeps on making peace, though this indeed may be true). The peace is clearly that between Jew and Gentile.” [Best, 263] “The peace in view at this point is between the two old enemies, not with God, and making peace here, as in Col 1:20, is a synonym for reconciling, the notion which follows immediately.” [Lincoln, 144]

*“in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord” – v21*

**being joined together** — συναρμολογουμένη [sunarmologoumenē] “In important ancient buildings the stones were carefully fitted together, συναρμολογουμένη [sunarmologoumenē] (only elsewhere at 4.16), being smoothed where the surfaces met, dowel holes drilled and dowels inserted. The stones which are here being fitted together (present tense) are not the two groups, Jewish and Gentile Christians, but individual believers. Thus the argument which moved in v. 20 from believers as members of a household into the material with which the house was built and indicated the positions of apostles, prophets and Christ now depicts believers as harmoniously related to the believers beside, above and below them. No stone should be out of place. Since in fact believers do not always fit harmoniously together, as 4.25ff shows, the church is pictured as it ought to be rather than as it is.” [Best, 286f] “The participle συναρμολογέω [sunarmologoeō] is used only here and 4:16. Paul coined this word by adding the prepositional prefix συν- [sun-] to the rare verb ἀρμολογέω [harmologeō] meaning ‘to join’ or ‘pile together’ stones for a tomb. Hence, it would have the resultant meaning ‘to join, fit together,’ especially in regard to a construction made of stones. **Today the process of fitting stones together is rather simple because mortar is used. In that day with no use of mortar, there was an elaborate process of cutting and smoothing the stones so that they fit exactly next to each other.** The prepositional prefix συν-

[sun], which is common in Ephesians only, intensifies the fitting together. ***It speaks of the inner unity or harmony among believers who, before their conversion, were at enmity with one another.*** The present passive participle describes the manner of their growth. ***Specifically, as recipients of God's grace, they grow by being carefully fitted together rather than growing apart individually from one another. Notice that it is not self-initiative that causes the growth but the gracious action of God who fits individual believers with each other and with the foundation and cornerstone. If ancient masons used an elaborate process to fit the stones together, one can be assured that God, even more, by his grace is carefully fitting together the individuals who are a part of his building. His desire is to bring inner unity in order that corporate growth can occur.*** [Hoehner, 409] Excellent comments but I feel compelled to add this observation: Hoehner is a universal church man yet his understanding of this passage points specifically to a local church application. Without a local church application, his comments are mere theory.

## ● THE CHURCH SHOULD BE COMPOSED OF PEOPLE WHO ARE SAVED ONLY

*“and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.” – v16*

Those within the churches are just assumed in this passage to be those ‘reconciled’ to God. This is not to suggest church services are not open to the public and to the unsaved, but the focus and all decision-making must be among those who are already ‘reconciled to God.’ “This verse is not a consequence of v. 15b but parallel to it; terms are balanced (two – both, create – reconcile, in him – in one body, making peace – killing); like v. 15b it depends on  $\nu\alpha$  [hina, ‘in order to’] and provides a second purpose relating to the whole of vv. 14b-15a. ***Unlike v. 15b which spoke of the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles, v. 16 treats the relationship of both to God; thus the ambiguity of horizontal and vertical which commenced in v. 13 is continued and at the same time resolved. Not only do Jew and Gentile move towards one another; both move towards God. Neither movement may be said to be prior to the other or regarded as its basis, unlike Mt 5.23 where the horizontal precedes the vertical. Here the reconciliations are as inseparable as the two great commandments to love.*** [Best, 263f]

## ● SALVATION IS THE SAME FOR ALL PEOPLE, JEW OR GENTILE

*“and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.” – v16*

“Whatever advantages Jews may once have had (v. 12) no distinction is now made between the ways in which they and Gentiles are reconciled to God.” [Best, 265] “The discontinuity between Israel, as the people of God, and the Church is evidenced also by vv 16, 17, where Jews as well as Gentiles are said to be reconciled to God by Christ, and where ‘the near’ need peace with God proclaimed to them as well as ‘the far.’ Despite what he believed to have been their real advantages, this writer holds also that Israel too was alienated from her God.” [Lincoln, 163]

## ● OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD AND TO EACH OTHER IS ALL BASED UPON THE WORK OF CHRIST

*“For He Himself is our peace, who did make both groups into one and did break down the dividing wall of hostility” – v14*

**For he himself** —  $\text{Αὐτὸς γάρ}$  [autos gar] Emphatic because of position. Some takes this to mean “He Himself and no other” while some state there is no contrast implied in the grammar.

*“for through Him we both have our access by one Spirit to the Father” – v18*

**For through him** — “For” introduces this statement as one which provides the grounds for the assertion of the previous verse that Christ has proclaimed peace to the far off and peace to the near. This reinforces our interpretation of the nature of the peace announced to the two groups. Since both have access to the Father through Christ in the one Spirit, the same good news of peace with God can be brought to both.” [Lincoln, 149]

**we both have access** — access —  $\text{προσαγωγή}$  [prosaogōgēn] has the basic meaning of “*freedom or right to enter.*” It could be taken transitively (= *introduction*) or intransitively (= *access*). “Either sense is grammatically possible.... If it is intransitive, then Christ is the one who acts to create access; if transitive, then he (through him) is the one who introduces believers to God. The former is preferable.... There is however very little difference in essential meaning: ***believers come to God only through what Christ has done for them or as he introduces them. The root was used in the contemporary world to describe the approach of people to a ruler and, more importantly, for the offering of sacrificial gifts (Lev 1.2, 3, 10, etc.).... Christ presents believers to his Father. If God is to be encountered the way must be opened, not from our end but from his.***” [Best, 273f]

*“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone” – v20*

“This clause ... serves to set off Christ both from the foundation of the apostles and prophets and from those who have been placed on that foundation.” [Lincoln, 154]

*“in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord” – vv 21*

**in the Lord.** —  $\text{ἐν κυρίῳ}$ , [en kuriō] ***“The existence of the church is centred on Christ.”*** [Best, 288] “In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul says: ‘In whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.’ (Eph. 2:21,22 RV) Here are two distinct affirmations: First — each several building or particular assembly growth into a holy temple of the Lord. That is by itself it is a temple of the Lord. Second — What is true of each is true of the church at Ephesus, ‘In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the

Spirit.’ Just before this he had written of the church as an institution, or abstractly, in which Jew and Gentile are made into one. But the abstract become concrete in each several building.” [Carroll, *Ecclesia*, pg 12] ““And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the (Greek, every) building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.’ (Eph 2:20,21) ... The Ephesian letter was probably an encyclical, intended to circulate among several churches. Then 2:21 has greater meaning if ‘all the’ (Gk., *pasa*) of the King James version yields to the American Standard’s ‘each several building.’ This more accurate translation implies that Paul was not writing about one vast universal church, but rather about many distinct, individual, ‘local’ churches. Then each church, in every century and in every land, may claim the first church as its divine pattern.” [S. E. Anderson, *The First Church*, pg 12f]

## ● THE FULL ACCEPTANCE OF ALL BELIEVERS IN CHRIST

*“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are members of God’s household” – v19*

*“The first Gentile believers who were admitted to a church comprising Jewish Christians could well have felt ill at ease; it was desirable that they should be made to feel completely at home. The church had a Jewish base; its members had Jewish presuppositions, and it would have been too easy for Gentile Christians to do or say something which was felt to be out of place.*

*What indeed was their status in such a community? Were they there on sufferance, as visitors, like the God-fearing Gentiles who*

*attended synagogue in cities of the dispersion? Was their position like that of resident aliens in a Greek city, or that of peregrini in Rome? In a crisis like that which arose in Antioch when Peter and others abandoned the practice of table-fellowship with Gentile Christians Paul protested vigorously at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14), and it is Paul’s attitude that finds uncompromising expression here.”* [Bruce, 302] As Bruce goes on to note, this door swung both ways in the course of time.

“In writing to the Christians of Rome, Paul implies that some of the Gentiles among them were inclined to look down on their Jewish fellow-Christians as poor relations, mercifully rescued from an apostate nation, and he warns them against such an attitude: ‘remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you’ (Rom 11:18). They had been cut out of the wild live, the fruitless shoot to which they originally belonged, and grafted into the good olive tree, to share the nutriment and fertility of the true people of God. The credit was not theirs; they were entirely indebted to God’s mercy. *In our present epistle there is no suggestion that its Gentile recipients stood in need of such a warning; what they are given is full encouragement to magnify the grace of God which has rescued them from their former place as rank outsiders and instated them among his children.*” [Bruce, 303]

**peregrini** — Latin for a pilgrim, a wanderer, or a journeying foreigner. Originally, the Romans divided all persons into *Cives* and *Peregrini*: the *cives* had *connubium* (the faculty of contracting a Roman marriage) and *commercium* (the right of acquiring ownership); the *peregrini* had neither.

**but you are fellow citizens** — “But the readers are no longer completely without a homeland; they are no longer even second-class citizens in someone else’s homeland. They now have full citizenship in and belong firmly to a commonwealth, for they are fellow citizens with the holy ones.” [Lincoln, 150]

## ● CHURCH MEMBERS TO CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER AS FAMILY

*“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are members of God’s household” – v19*

**and members of the household of God,** — Paul now changes his metaphor to a household, almost implying kinship. *“The house and the city were very similar concepts in the ancient world. This phrase then, unlike the first which referred to a relationship among believers, relates believers to God. Christians form a community related to Christ or God behind which lies the concept of Israel as God’s house. Believers are children of God (2 Cor 6.18), adopted as such (1.5) and given access to him (2.18), the head of the household. All this implies intimacy. The [oikeioi] are members of the house, not necessarily kinfolk but certainly not slaves; nor are they ‘guests — here today and away tomorrow’ — well treated when present but forgotten when gone.... Gentile Christians, once refugees, are now neither homeless nor stateless. Those who were once outsiders are now insiders.”* [Best, 278f] This household of God consists of believers, both on earth and in heaven, as well as holy angels.

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# TRANSPARENCIES

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh,  
who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in  
the flesh by human hands —

<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time:

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

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood  
of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace,

- *who did make both groups into one*
- and did break down the dividing wall of hostility,  
<sup>15</sup> by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments  
contained in ordinances,

*so that, in order that*

- *in Himself He might make the two into one new man*, thus establishing peace,
- <sup>16</sup> *and might reconcile them both in one body* to God through the cross, by it having  
put to death the enmity.

<sup>17</sup> AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND  
PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;

<sup>18</sup> for through Him we both have our access by one Spirit to the Father.

<sup>19</sup> *So then ... [CONSEQUENTLY, THEREFORE]*

**imagery: the STATE** —

you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints,

**imagery: the FAMILY** —

and are members of God’s household,

**imagery: a BUILDING** —

<sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself  
being the corner stone,

**imagery: a TEMPLE** —

<sup>21</sup> *in whom* the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the  
Lord,

<sup>22</sup> *in whom* you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

# DOCTRINAL

- THE CHURCH IS A 'NEW ENTITY'
- THE CHURCH IS MORE THAN REFORMED JUDAISM
- IF THE CHURCH IS A 'NEW ENTITY' THEN HOW DOES THAT RECONCILE WITH A 'UNIVERSAL-INVISIBLE CHURCH' THAT HAS EXISTED SINCE ADAM?
- THE 'BUILDING' WAS 'BUILT' PRIOR TO THE ADDITION OF NEW MEMBERS
- EACH TRUE CHURCH IS A MICROCOSM OF ETERNITY
- 'WHOLE' IN VERSE 21 COULD REFER TO 'EACH SEVERAL BUILDING' = LOCAL CHURCHES
- SOME ARGUE AGAINST CHRIST AS THE 'CAPSTONE' BECAUSE IT DOES NOT FIT WITH THEIR 'UNIVERSAL-INVISIBLE CHURCH' INTERPRETATION

# PRACTICAL

- CORPORATE WORSHIP IS IMPORTANT
- SALVATION RECONCILES BOTH VERTICALLY AND HORIZONTALLY
- THE CHURCH SHOULD BE COMPOSED OF PEOPLE WHO ARE SAVED ONLY
- SALVATION IS THE SAME FOR ALL PEOPLE, JEW OR GENTILE
- OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD AND TO EACH OTHER IS ALL BASED UPON THE WORK OF CHRIST
- THE FULL ACCEPTANCE OF ALL BELIEVERS IN CHRIST
- CHURCH MEMBERS TO CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER AS FAMILY