

Ephesians 2.11-21

Paul outlines a grand vision to his Gentile audience: coming into a new kingdom, a new creation

Statue of Liberty, torch held high – New York's Liberty Island. NY Harbour (93m)

- Designer Bartholdi depicted Liberty enlightening the world - figure of a classically draped woman
- a torch above her head with her right hand
- in her left hand carries a [*tabula ansata*](#) inscribed JULY IV MDCCLXXVI (July 4, 1776, in [Roman numerals](#)), the date of the [U.S. Declaration of Independence](#).
- With her left foot she steps on a broken chain and [shackle](#), commemorating the [national abolition of slavery](#) following the [American Civil War](#).
- After its dedication (1886) the statue became an icon of freedom and of the United States, seen as **a symbol of welcome to [immigrants arriving](#)** by sea.
- Wars and other upheavals in Europe prompted large-scale emigration to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century
- saw the statue not as a symbol of enlightenment, as Bartholdi had intended, but as **a sign of welcome to their new home**
- consistent with Emma Lazarus's vision in her 1883 sonnet— affixed to the base of the statue in 1903. Closing lines:
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Recap:

1.1-12 Election of Israel to being God's people, in order to work out his purposes/the mystery of his will. Israel, having failed to be the people called to be, believing Jews now blessed as the first to believe in Christ Jesus who has proved to be the true Israel. God's purpose always "to unite all things in him (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth" (vv.9-10).

1.13-14 When Gentiles believed in Christ, they too became part of God's inheritance, joining believing Israel in receiving an inheritance – testified to by the fact that they have received the Holy Spirit.

1.15-23 Paul's prayer for the Gentiles that they might 'catch up' with those chosen first – the Jews – by being given a special revelation (given that they did not have the experience of God's presence, wonders in history and Torah that the Jews had) and know Christ risen, ascended and glorified (the hope to which Israel had looked – in the Messiah).

2.1-10 How God made the spiritually dead (vv.2-3), both Jew and Gentile, alive in Christ: by his grace, according to his love and their faith

2.11-22 Expands on 2.1-10, making more specific the contrast between what Gentiles once were (spiritually dead) and what they – along with believing Israel - are now (reconciled through Christ) – having been raised from spiritual death to new life in Christ.

God not only gave individuals new life (vv.1-10), he brings those individuals into a new community his body, the Church (vv.14-22).

VV. 11-22 fall into 3 parts:

A. vv.11-12 call to remember what/who once were. SEPARATED

B. vv.13-18 call to recognise who/what are now. UNITED

C. vv.19-22 call to realise (live it out). BEING BUILT TOGETHER INTO GOD'S DWELLING PLACE

v. 11 "Remember..."

v.13 "But now, in Christ..."

v.19 "So then..."

A. vv.11-12 “Remember...(who) you were...” SEPARATED

Picture of 2 peoples:

Jew

Circumcised
Joined to Christ
Citizens of Israel/people of God
Partner to the Covenants
People of hope (Messianic)
Near to God

Gentile

Uncircumcised
Separated from Christ
Alienated from Israel
Strangers to the Covenants
No hope (Messianic)
Without God/Far off

Status of Gentiles: the ‘uncircumcised’ (old labels which assumed far too much importance) but pointed to more serious issues for Gentiles:

- Separated from Christ
- Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel (theocracy under God).
NB. Separation from Israel and her Messiah go together. Jesus = true Israelite.
- Strangers to the covenants of promise
- No hope –
 - as had no share in Israel’s Messiah.
 - History = cyclic for pagans/gentiles.
 - No hope of a redeemer, nor of deliverance and a future glory.
- Without God in this world: no knowledge of the true God

Reminiscent of a 1986 bumper sticker in London: "The U.S. has Ronald Reagan, Johnny Cash, Bob Hope and Stevie Wonder. We Have Margaret Thatcher, no Cash, no Hope - and no Wonder."

William Henriksen: They were “Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and Godless.”

⇒ In sum, they were FAR OFF (term often used of foreigners – Deut 28.49; 29.22; 1 Kgs 8.41; Isa 5.26; Jer 5.15).

Cf. our post-communion prayer in 1984 liturgy “We were far off until you brought us home...” drawing also on Prodigal in Far Country (Luke 15.13)

Cf. Moses’ words to Israel in Deut 4.7 “For what great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?”

B. vv.13-18 “But now in Christ Jesus you... have been brought near...”

UNITED BY CHRIST, THE PEACEMAKER

BUT

Now **BROUGHT NEAR in Christ**, i.e. emphasis is on access to God

- By the blood of Jesus Christ

He himself is **our peace** – as in 2.1=10

Has **made us one** – one new humanity

- No longer defined by anything else but relationship to Christ. Transcends all.
- Has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments, i.e. laws that separate (sabbath, purity, dietary, sacrifices, circumcision).
 - Image of wall in temple between Court of Gentiles and Court of Women: 1m wide slab “No foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”
 - See Acts 21.27-30, three years earlier Paul was accused of bringing Gentile Ephesian Trophimus into the Temple, for which he was nearly lynched.
- the Law underscored the divide between (Israel’s failure to keep the Law) and erected a wall (Sabbath observance, circumcision, cleanliness/purity) with Gentiles.

Don’t underestimate the antagonism caused by Jewish exclusivity, including allegiance to one God only, and veneration of Moses’ law as unique.

Instead of Israel embracing her role as being a light to the nations, the channel of God’s blessing to all people, Israel had cut herself off and seen herself as YHWH’s exclusive people. More than that, there were divisions within Israel: righteous and unrighteous, Sadducees and Pharisees, Herodians etc.

But note too that **Jesus = Israel**, so God’s calling/election was not nullified/revoked, but fulfilled in him. The covenant with Abraham (Gen 12) is now fulfilled in Abraham’s seed – Jesus the Christ. Romans 9.5: “To them

belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

That he might create in himself **one new humanity** in the place of the two, i.e. he doesn't make Gentiles a part of Israel, but has now appointed a new 'elect people' of faith, made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Remember what said about twin problems of Judaizers and Gentiles who wrote Israel out of God's story/new creation.

⇒ MAKING PEACE

⇒ Reconciling us both to God and to one another, in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility

NB. Jesus *is* our peace. It is **a double reconciliation** – to God and to one another.

- Jesus preached peace to you who were far off and those who were near. See Isa 57.19
- Through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father (cf. Jn 4.23-24); Rom 5.1 "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This access is new to both Gentiles and Jews.

Access is in the Spirit because it is God's Holy Spirit in us which is his presence in us (his 'temple'). Cf. John 4

The HS gives us immediate access to the Father.

"The Church in Eph 2... stands for the overcoming of all divisions caused by tradition, class, colour, nation or group of nations." Lincoln,

For the early Church, the most powerful symbol of unity = sharing **table fellowship**, particularly the Lord's Supper. NB. too Jesus' eating with sinners and his banquet parables.

Unity = now in Christ, by the Spirit. All have access to the one Father

Access to God => developed further in vv. 19-22

C. vv.19-22 “So then... you are being built together into a dwelling place for God...” **BEING BUILT TOGETHER.**

⇒ You are no longer strangers and aliens but you are

- fellow citizens and
- members of the household of God,

NB. citizen -> family = even greater closeness

Built on **[CHANGE OF METAPHOR]**

- the foundation of the apostles and the prophets
- Christ Jesus himself be the cornerstone (Ps 118.22 “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”), in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Largest stone in S wall = c.12m long, 570 tons.

“In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place (not *hieron*, the temple as a whole, but *naos*, the inner shrine) for God by the Spirit.”

What a contrast: from outside the commonwealth, barred from entering Temple precincts, to being stones in the new (spiritual) Temple! Gentiles couldn't be more 'in'!

This is the very place where God is present in the Spirit.

Paul, in Ephesians, employs 3 images of Church:

1. Body (1.23; 2.26; 4.16)
2. Building (2.19-22).
3. Bride (5.25)

Church as Building:

In 1 Cor 3.11 said Christ is the foundation. Here says the Apostles and Prophets = the foundation, Christ the cornerstone/keystone. Point is that it isn't the persons of the apostles and prophets (i.e. NT prophets, as in 3.5 and 4.11) themselves, but their preaching Christ which is the foundation. Making Christ the cornerstone or capstone/keystone confirms his pre-eminence: the cornerstone set the “lie” and the level of the whole building, it aligns everything; the cap/keystone held it together.

And we find “our true place and function in relation to Christ as we are built into him.” (Foulkes)

Lincoln: "... they see themselves as now part of a community that is growing into a holy temple in the LORD. This is meant to produce an attitude of profound thankfulness and a mind-set that will be ready to accept the **ethical implications** of being a new holy community, when these are spelled out in the exhortations of the latter part of the letter."

NB. The unity accomplished in the Church is **an anticipation of final cosmic unity – envisioned in 1.10** (see Lincoln)

The high **God of heaven has now chosen to dwell in this one new humanity** – the Church. There is no longer division where there is worship and walking in Spirit and Truth.

The whole Church now has the privileged call of **revealing and bearing witness** to God to the world. It is in this sense that **the Church is God's elect** from every nation.

The building of the members of God's household is an ongoing process – they are "being built together". It is only "in the fullness of time that he will unite all things in him" (1.10).

How's it going? Is the Church the new united, inclusive creation intended, or have we set up new dividing walls? For homegroups to discuss!

Statue of Christ the Redeemer, Rio de Janeiro (38m)

Christ the [Redeemer](#) with open arms, a symbol of peace.

Stott's Summary:

It would be hard to exaggerate the grandeur of this vision. The new society God has brought into being is nothing short of a new creation, a new human race, whose characteristic is no longer alienation but reconciliation, no longer division and hostility but unity and peace. This new society God rules and loves and lives in.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. How do you look back on the time before you knew Christ? How would you describe yourself/your situation at that time? What awareness did you have of your need for Jesus?
2. If question 1 is not applicable (e.g. you don't recall ever being apart from Christ) , how do you understand the situation of others who don't know Christ? In what ways may they be described as "far away" from God?
3. How can one be faithful to Paul's understanding of Israel/the Jews today, i.e. their being in need of Christ's redemption, no different to Gentiles, but still having an important part to play, historically, in God's great plan?
4. How is God "building the church together" today, into a spiritual temple? What does/should it mean for all Christians to be one household? One new humanity?
5. What sort of "dividing walls" has the Church erected which bring division/separation into the Body?
6. What bearing does Ephesians have on the significance of sharing the Lord's Supper together? How does it enrich our understanding of what God does as we share the Lord's Supper?
7. Paul writes that the spiritual temple is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, meaning the NT prophets. What does that indicate about the importance of prophets in the early church, and today?
8. Christ is the cornerstone. What does it mean to say that everything in the Church should be aligned with him?