



THE CHURCH: THE ONE NEW MAN IN JESUS CHRIST EPHESIANS 2:11-22

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One of the more dangerous and destructive sins that has at times permeated our society is that of racism. When we hear that word, we typically think immediately of the division that often exists between black and white. Of course, native American Indians have also been the target of racism, as have those from countries such as China and India.

But the worst example of racism that I know of was rampant in the ancient world. I have in mind the racist hostility that existed between Jewish people and those of Samaria, but especially the intense division between Jewish people and Gentiles. It is this latter expression of racism that I want us to explore today.

In Ephesians 2:1-10 Paul explained the meaning and spiritual mechanics of salvation in relation to the individual, whether Jew or Gentile. Death in sin is common to all, irrespective of ethnic origin (2:1-3). Likewise, none is saved but by the grace of God in Christ (2:4-10).

This salvation of the individual, however, also has social and corporate implications. The redemptive work of Christ has forever abolished the inequalities that once existed between Jew and Gentile. Gentiles, at one time both physically and spiritually far away from the blessings of God, have now been brought near. ***Christ has abolished the barrier that not only separated God from Gentile but also Jew from Gentile.*** Through the blood of Christ, the believing Gentile has been incorporated as a fellow-citizen into the household of God, receiving equal status with the believing Jew, the two together forming ***one new man in Christ, the Church.***

In describing this great event, Paul first portrays the condition of the Gentiles before the cross (2:11-12). He then explains what Christ has done to reverse their lost condition (2:13-18), and finally he describes what we, as believing Gentiles, in conjunction with believing Jews, have become: the Church of Jesus Christ, a holy temple in the Lord (2:19-22).

It would also appear that 2:11-22 sheds light on the meaning of God's eternal purpose to sum up all things in Christ as stated in 1:10. "Two obstacles need to be overcome before the divine purposes would reach their fulfillment – the subjection of the powers (representing 'the things in heaven'), and the church, particularly the relationship of Jews and Gentiles (representing 'the things on earth')" (O'Brien, 183).

Gentiles before Jesus – 2:11-12

Paul doesn't pull any punches in his description of the pathetic status of Gentiles prior to the coming of Jesus Christ. Actually, when it comes to spiritual truth, he *never* pulls any punches. He mentions five things about them, none of which are positive. By the way, be sure that when you read this, you understand that he's talking about virtually all of us who are Gentiles.

1. He first describes them as uncircumcised – 2:11

We know that for Jewish people circumcision was a surgical procedure commanded by God as a symbol of his covenant with Israel (Gen. 17:2, 10-14). The label "uncircumcised", used by Jews of Gentiles, was one of derision and scorn.

Paul doesn't simply refer to "circumcision" when describing Jewish people. He refers to it as "what is called" circumcision. Some translations render it, "so-called" circumcision. Referring to Jewish circumcision in this manner may be Paul's way of pointing to the worthlessness of the physical rite as a basis for acceptance with God (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 1 Cor. 7:19; Phil. 3:3; Gal. 5:6 ["for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love"]).

The word translated "by hands" (*cheiropoiotos*) and its opposite are used in the NT to contrast what is made by humans with what is made by God. It also points to the contrast between the external material aspects of the old order of Judaism under the Mosaic covenant and the internal spiritual efficacy of the new order under the New covenant (Mark. 14:58; Acts 7:48; 17:24; Heb. 9:11,24).

Thus, to speak of something “not made by human hands” (*acheiropoietos*) is to assert that God himself has created it (e.g., the temple that Jesus would build in three days in Mark. 14:58; the heavenly house [i.e., body] which believers receive at death in 2 Cor. 5:1; and that true, spiritual circumcision of the heart which comes through the death of Christ in Col. 2:11). ***Paul’s point is that the circumcision performed in the flesh with human hands is no longer the real or spiritually meaningful circumcision.***

2. He also describes Gentiles as separated from Christ – 2:12a

The word translated “separated” is used in only two other places (Eph. 4:18; Col. 1:21) and means alienation or estrangement from God. But now they are “in Christ”! The question is raised: How can it be that having been separate from Christ is parallel to having been separated from Israel? It would appear that Paul “can make this point because he conceives of Christ as the Messiah belonging to Israel [or, as Best says, “the Messiah for whom Israel hoped” (241)]. His thought here, and later in this verse, appears to be dependent on Rom. 9:4,5, where Paul could say ‘and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ’” (Lincoln, 137).

3. Gentiles before the coming of Jesus were alienated or excluded from the commonwealth of Israel – 2:12b

The word translated “commonwealth” has the idea not only of a state or government but even more so of the rights extending to its citizens, i.e., privileges, blessings, resources, duties, etc. During that age God had restricted his elective purposes to Israel, but now, with the coming and cross of Christ, believing Gentiles are “fellow citizens” (v. 19).

4. Before Christ, Gentiles were strangers to the covenants of promise – 2:12c

The plural “covenants” points to a series of covenants: with Abraham (Gen. 15; 17), Isaac (Gen. 26:2-5), Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15), and David (2 Sam. 7). These covenants were all characterized by or based on “promise,” i.e., God’s pledge to be faithful to his people and to fulfill his word to them. One might even translate the phrase, “the covenants *which embodied* the promise” of God. Though Gentiles had no part in this promise they are now co-heirs with Christ.

In this regard, we need to seriously consider what Paul says in **Galatians 3:16,28-29** –

“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ” (v. 16).

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (vv. 28-29).

Here Paul provides us with an inspired commentary on, or interpretation of, those OT passages dealing with the promises contained in the covenant with Abraham. In 3:16 he declares, “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring [or, seed]. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings’ [or ‘seeds’], referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring [seed],’ who is Christ.” Amazing! Here Paul unequivocally says that the “seed” or “offspring” of Abraham with whom God established his covenant and to whom the land and all its blessings were promised was ultimately only ONE of Abraham’s physical progeny, Jesus the Messiah! ***Jesus is “THE SEED” of Abraham whom God had in mind when he made his covenant promise.***

Upon reading this one might think that the door has now been shut on everyone else, whether Jew or Gentile, and that only Jesus will inherit the promises. But just when you think that Paul has narrowed it down to one person and one person only, he throws wide open the gate into God’s kingdom blessings by saying at the close of Galatians 3, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. *And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring* [i.e., seed], *heirs according to promise* (vv. 28-29; emphasis mine).

Here is Paul’s stunning point: Jesus the Messiah is the one seed or progeny or offspring of Abraham to whom the promises were given. But, if you are “in Christ” through faith and thus belong to him, then you too “are Abraham’s offspring” or “seed” and thus you too are an heir of the covenant promises! This is why Paul can say “that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7) and that “those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal. 3:9; cf. 3:14).

Paul's conclusion is that in the final analysis ***one's ethnicity has nothing to do with who will or will not inherit the promises***. Neither does gender ("neither male nor female") or socio-economic status ("there is neither slave nor free"). The only relevant criterion is whether or not you are related by faith to the one seed of Abraham for whom the covenant promises were intended. Are you "in Christ"? If so, you (regardless of ethnicity, gender, or social status) no less than he, are Abraham's seed and thus the ones for whom the covenant was intended and in whom the covenant blessings will be fulfilled.

5. Gentiles had no hope – 2:12d

Because God's saving purposes during the time of the Mosaic Covenant were largely restricted to Jews, Gentiles had little to no hope.

6. They were without God in the world – 2:12e

The word translated "without God" (*atheoi*) is the Greek term from which we get our word "atheist." It can have several meanings: (1) not believing in God; (2) godless, in the ethical sense; (3) forsaken by God himself. William Hendriksen summed up the condition of Gentiles before the coming of Jesus. They were ***"Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless"*** (Hendriksen, 129).

The Barrier Abolished – 2:13-16

The apostle first describes what Jesus has done to overcome this horrible, lost condition of Gentiles.

1. Gentiles who were "far off" from God and the blessings which at that time only Jewish people enjoyed, have been brought near through the blood of Jesus – v. 13

The words "but now" at the beginning of v. 13 are to be seen in vivid contrast with "at that time" of v. 12. "In Christ" in v. 13 contrasts with "separated from Christ" of v. 12.

The words "far off" and "near" in v. 13 have both a geographical or spatial as well as spiritual meaning. See Deut. 4:7; Ps. 148:14; Dan. 9:7; Acts 2:39; 22:21. The spatial distance of the Gentiles was symbolic of their spiritual and moral separation as well (see Deut. 28:49; 29:22; 1 Kings 8:41; Isa. 5:26; Jer. 5:15).

2. Jesus, through his shed blood, has made both Jew and Gentile into one – v. 14a

Paul's emphasis on "peace" is unmistakable: he uses the term 4x in vv. 14,15,17(twice), as well as related concepts of reconciliation (v. 16), making the two into one (v. 14), creating one new humanity (v. 15), etc. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in Eph. 6:15 Paul will refer to the message of Christianity as being "the gospel of *peace*." That peace should now exist between the two is remarkable, given the fact that Jewish people held immense contempt for Gentiles.

William Barclay put it this way:

"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 that he had made . . . 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. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death" (125).

3. Jesus has broken down the dividing wall of hostility that formerly separated the two – v. 14b

Gentiles were alienated not only from God but also from the Jewish people. This double alienation was symbolized by the "dividing wall of hostility" or "the barrier of the dividing wall" (NASB). There are two possible interpretations of this phrase.

First, some argue that this refers literally to the temple balustrade which separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts and the sanctuary. It was a notable feature of Herod's temple in Jerusalem. The temple itself was

on an elevated platform. Around it was the Court of the Priests. To the east was the Court of Israel, and farther east was the Court of the Women. John Stott explains this for us:

"These three courts – for the priests, the lay men and the lay women of Israel respectively – were all on the same elevation as the temple itself. From this level one descended five steps to a walled platform, and then on the other side of the wall fourteen more steps to another wall, beyond which was the outer court or Court of the Gentiles. This was a spacious court running right round the temple and its inner courts. From any part of it the Gentiles could look up and view the temple, but were not allowed to approach it. They were cut off from it by the surrounding wall, which was a one-and-a-half-meter stone barricade, on which were displayed at intervals warning notices in Greek and Latin. They read, in effect, not 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' but 'Trespassers will be executed,'" (Stott, 91-92).

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus, describes this barricade in his *Antiquities*. He writes that the temple was

"encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death" (XV, 11.5). The partition was "made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits [i.e., four and one half feet]. Its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars at equal distance from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek and some in Roman letters, that 'no foreigner should go within that sanctuary'" (*Wars of the Jews*, V.5.2).

Two of the Greek signs have been discovered, one in 1871 and the other in 1935. The former, now housed in a museum in Istanbul, Turkey, is a white limestone slab approximately one meter across. It reads: **"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 esp. Acts 21:27-31. Once again, John Stott is helpful:

"This, then, is the historical, social and religious background to Ephesians 2. Although all human beings are alienated from God because of sin, the Gentiles were also alienated from the people of God. And worse even than this double alienation (of which the temple wall was a symbol) was the active 'enmity' or 'hostility' (*echthra*) into which it continuously erupted – enmity between man and God, and enmity between Gentiles and Jews. The grand theme of Ephesians 2 is that Jesus Christ has destroyed both enmities" (92).

The apostle Paul was intimately familiar with this wall, having been accused by the Jews of taking a Gentile named Trophimus into the inner courts of the temple (Acts 21:28-29). This accusation against Paul was what ultimately resulted in his nearly four years of imprisonment.

The second view is that the barrier Paul mentions is the Mosaic Law itself which functioned to protect Israel from Gentile impurity. The first phrase of v. 15 thus parallels the last phrase of v. 14. Therefore, "having broken down . . . the dividing wall" (v. 14b) is simply another way of saying that the "law of commandments" has been abolished (v. 15a).

According to this view, the Mosaic Law was a sign of Jewish particularism and created a fence around Israel thereby separating Jews from Gentiles both religiously and socially. This contributed to the deep-seated hostility between the two groups. The "law of commandments" (v. 15) or "ordinances" which prohibited Jews from eating or intermarrying with Gentiles often led Jewish people to have a contempt for Gentiles that led them to think of Gentiles as less than human. As for the Gentiles, they regarded Jews with great suspicion, believing them to be inhospitable and hateful.

A more recent parallel to this is the way blacks and whites were treated until recently. I'm old enough to remember seeing signs at water fountains, on buses, and in public restrooms that said either "White only" or "Black only."

4. How Jesus has done it – vv. 14b-15a

Jesus abolished the separation of Jew and Gentile by means of "his flesh" (v. 14b) i.e., the offering of himself upon the cross. In this way he abolished the law of commandments expressed in ordinances (2:15).

By "the law of commandments" or "ordinances" Paul is referring to the dictates of the Mosaic Law. Thus, the Mosaic covenant and its law no longer carry immediate authority for the believer. This is not to say that nothing in the Law

is relevant today (see Eph. 6:1-3; Rom. 13:8-10). It is to say that the OT law must be interpreted and applied *christologically*, i.e., in view of what Christ has done in fulfilling the law and inaugurating a new covenant.

Paul does not abolish the law as the Word of God or as a moral guide. What he abolished is the law as *a set of regulations that excludes Gentiles*. Paul quite simply will no longer allow any practice of the law that excludes Gentiles or perhaps might suggest that they have to become Jews.

5. So, why did he do it? –vv. 15b-16

Paul identifies two goals that were in the mind of Jesus and the Father. First, it was in order to create one new man in place of the two (v. 15b).

By “new man” he means the Christian community in its corporate identity, the Church. By his shed blood Jesus has created a new society, a new class of humanity: the Church! This new man is not simply a mixture of the old in which the best of Judaism and the best of the Gentile world are combined. This is a completely *new creation* in which distinctives of Jewishness and Gentileness are irrelevant. People still remain either Jewish or Gentile, but ***that racial distinction is irrelevant to God***. It no longer tells us who inherits the promises of the old covenant. Thus, as Andrew Lincoln says, “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 (cf. vv. 15,16,18). In accomplishing this, Christ has transcended one of the fundamental divisions of the first-century world” (140-41).

Therefore, it is not as though Gentiles are transformed into Jews or Jews into Gentiles. Rather “the resulting new humanity transcends the two old entities, even though unbelieving Israel and disobedient Gentiles continue to exist” (O’Brien, 184). ***For Paul, there are but three groups of people in the world: unbelieving Jews, unbelieving Gentiles, and the Church (cf. 1 Cor. 10:32).*** See esp. Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28; 6:15.

The second goal Jesus sought achieve was to reconcile both in one body to God (v. 16). The one “body” is a reference to the church and denotes the same reality as the “one new man” in v. 15. It was “by the cross” that this was achieved. “Christ in his death was slain, but the slain was a slayer too” (Robinson, 65). The “hostility” or “enmity” (v. 16) which Christ has killed is both vertical (between God and humanity) and horizontal (between Jew and Gentile).

Observe that “both”, i.e. Gentiles no less so than Jews, have been reconciled to God through the cross. If one should ask how Jews are now said to be reconciled to God, Paul would respond that the law which separated Gentiles from Israel, and from Israel’s God, also separated Israel from God due to her failure to obey (see Gal. 3:10-22; Rom. 3:19-20; 9:30-10:4). Note also that this “reconciliation” of Jew to God and Gentile to God is not in isolation from the other, but “in one body”, i.e., in their new identity as the Church, the new “third race”, if you will.

The Message Christ Jesus proclaimed – vv. 17-18

Jesus proclaimed “peace” both to Gentiles who were “far off” (remember how this was described in v. 12) and to Jews who “were near.” He did this during his earthly ministry in general and more specifically by means of the cross.

The result of the message and ministry of Jesus is that both believing Jews and believing Gentiles have “access in one Spirit to the Father” (v. 18). Whatever else you see here, please don’t miss the fact that ***no one particular ethnic body or group of people has priority over all others. We all equally have access to God through the Holy Spirit.***

Paul’s imagery most likely derives from the OT sacrificial system in which offerings were brought into the presence of God (Lev. 1:3; 3:3; 4:14). But notice the emphasis: “we *both* have *our* access . . .” As O’Brien points out, “it is not simply that individual Gentiles and Jews have unhindered entry into the presence of God, wonderful as this is. In addition, both of them as *one new humanity* can come into his presence. ‘Jew and Gentile stand together as one people in God’s presence with old distinctions no longer having significance’” (209).

Let’s not overlook the fact that each one of us, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of national affiliation or citizenship, have equal access to the Father. It is “through Christ” and in the power of the Holy Spirit. What does this say about the Roman Catholic belief that we are to pray to Mary or to the saints in heaven? Why would I bother to seek their help and counsel when I can go directly and with confidence to the Creator God himself!

Back in vv. 11-12 Paul described Gentiles before Jesus came and died and rose again from the dead. Now, in vv. 19-22, he turns to describe believing Gentiles after Jesus came.

Gentiles after Jesus – 2:19-22

1. Jews and Gentiles are now fellow citizens (v. 19a)

Believing Gentiles are no longer “strangers and aliens” but are now “fellow citizens” together with believing Jewish people. Believing Gentiles are now neither homeless nor second-class citizens in someone else’s kingdom or homeland: *they are fello -citizens with the saints!* See Phil. 3:20.

But who are the “saints” with whom believing Gentiles now share this glorious privilege? Surely, he has in mind Jewish men and women from any time in history who have put their faith in Jesus. ***Whatever a Jewish believer can claim in fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so too can Gentile believers.***

2. We are all now members of God’s household – v. 19b

The imagery now shifts from the political realm of citizenry and its rights to the intimacy of a family and home. It is not simply that Jews and Gentiles are fellow citizens under God’s rule: they are now children together, brothers and sisters, in God’s family. Lincoln’s comments are worthy of note:

“As the text stands, the Gentiles’ former disadvantages have been reversed, not by their being incorporated into Israel, even into a renewed Israel of Jewish Christians, but by their being made members of a new community which transcends the categories of Jew and Gentile, an entity which is a new creation, not simply a merging of the former groupings. . . . Gentiles no longer lack a commonwealth. Yet this is not because they are now part of the commonwealth of Israel, but because they are fellow citizens with all the saints ***in the Church*** . . . [Thus] there is no escaping the conclusion that Eph. 2 depicts the Church in terms of a new third entity, one which transcends the old ethnic and religious entities of Jew and Gentile” (163).

What is “***Replacement***” theology, and does Paul advocate for it? No. What he is teaching is “***fulfillment***” theology, or perhaps “***expansion***” theology, or better still “***inclusion***” theology. His point isn’t that believing Gentiles in the Church have “replaced” Jewish people. No one has been replaced. Every Jewish believer in Jesus Christ will inherit the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. But so too will believing Gentiles on an equal basis! Believing Gentiles are “fellow citizens” with believing Jews, who together, as one new man, the Church, share equally in the covenant promises and all their blessings.

Paul is telling us that the definition of what constitutes a “Jew” is no longer an issue of ethnicity, but of faith. The meaning of “Israel” finds its “fulfillment” in the “one new man”, the Church. No one has been replaced. But God has “expanded” the definition of who constitutes “Israel” by “including” believing Gentiles on an equal footing.

3. We are now the Temple of the Lord – vv. 20-22

In 1 Cor. 3:9-17 Paul spoke of building on a foundation and of a temple indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In that passage Paul himself and other apostolic leaders are portrayed as laying the foundation, which is Christ himself, on whom/which they continue to build. But here the foundation consists of the apostles and prophets themselves, and Jesus is the cornerstone. We should not be surprised or bothered by this, for it is common in the NT for biblical authors to modify their metaphors and apply them in differing (but never contradictory) ways.

The “apostles and prophets” are the foundation of the church (v. 20) in that their inspired and revelatory teaching concerning the person and work of Christ provided the theological bedrock on which all subsequent ministry and spiritual growth occur.

The word translated “cornerstone” is somewhat ambiguous. Some argue that it should be rendered “capstone” and that it refers to the crowning stone at the **top** of the edifice, not the bottom.

In view of the usage of this word in Isa. 28:16 (the only text in the LXX where it is found), Paul most likely means that “Christ is the vital cornerstone on whom the building is constructed. The foundation and position of all the other stones in the superstructure were determined by him. He is ‘the one from which the rest of the foundation is built outwards along the line of the proposed walls’. Accordingly, the temple is built out and up from the revelation given in Christ, with the apostles and prophets elaborating and explaining the mystery, which has been made known to

them by the Holy Spirit (3:4-11, esp. v. 5). 'But all is built on Christ, supported by Christ, and the lie or shape of the continuing building is determined by Christ, the cornerstone'" (O'Brien, 217-18).

Its formation is described in v. 21. Notice the words "in whom" with which v. 21 opens and the words "in him" with which v. 22 open. The point is that this building, this "temple" functions only in relation to Jesus Christ. This formation of the temple is an on-going divine project, a continuous process (see also Eph. 4:15-16). Although it may seem strange to speak of a "building" experiencing continuous "growth", Paul surely wants us to conceive of the church as an *organic* entity. Recall that Peter also refers to believers somewhat paradoxically as "*living stones*" (1 Peter 2:5)!

In v. 22 Paul describes the function of this new spiritual temple. The word translated "dwelling" (*katoikētērion*) is used in the OT of God's dwelling in the temple at Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:13) and of his heavenly dwelling place (1 Kings 8:39,43). "Now his dwelling place can be said to be neither a literal temple in Jerusalem nor simply heaven, but the Church, of which the Gentile Christian readers in Asia Minor were a part" (Lincoln, 158). What theological and practical (indeed, *political*) significance is there in the fact that Paul says the individual Christian and the church corporately are the "temple" of God? See 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; 1 Peter 2:4-10; see also John 1:14; 2:19-22; Acts 7:48-50.

Three Concluding Comments

The **first** concerns what Paul has said in this paragraph concerning the relationship of Gentile and Jew in the body of Christ, the Church. It is my conviction that ***all distinctions, all spiritual privileges, all grounds for separation and alienation based on one's ancestry have been abolished by the blood of the cross. One's genetic history no longer has any bearing or weight or significance in the sight of God. One's ethnic identity no longer has relevance when it comes to the experience of spiritual privilege. The focus of God's presence, the repository of his power, is no more and never again shall be any ethnically united people-group who share a common ancestry, but rather a spiritually united church who share a common faith in Jesus Christ.***

Here is what all this means. God's aim in the gospel isn't simply to reconcile you to himself. It is also to reconcile you to the people of a different race, a different ethnicity, so that as one people, one body, we might all love each other and love God to his glory.

Therefore, in the sight of God there is no such thing as the white church or the black church or the Asian church or the Hispanic church or the native American Indian church. There is only the church. In the church, the body of Christ, racial or ethnic distinctives are real, but they don't matter. When we are born again our ethnic identity doesn't disappear. Our skin pigmentation doesn't change. But nothing of significance is based on the differences in our skin pigmentation or our land of origin. We are united as one "new man" in Christ. God dwells by his Spirit in all his people without regard for ethnicity.

The **second** concluding comment is what this passage and many others in the NT (see 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:18; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 Peter 2:4-10) teach us about the true Temple of God and whether or not there will be a third Temple built in Jerusalem.

God no longer lives in a tent or tabernacle built by human hands, *nor will he ever*. God's glorious manifest presence is not to be found in an ornate temple of marble, gold, and precious stones, but rather in Jesus. Jesus is the glory of God in human flesh, the one in whom God has finally and fully pitched his tent (John 1:14).

We, the church, are the body of Christ and therefore constitute the *temple* in which God is pleased to dwell. Simply put, God's residence is "neither a literal temple in Jerusalem nor simply heaven, but the Church, of which the Gentile Christian readers in Asia Minor were a part" (Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 158).

Let me come straight to the point. Beginning with the incarnation and consummating in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, together with the progressive building of his spiritual body, the Church, God is fulfilling his promise of an eschatological temple in which he will forever dwell (see 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

The **third** concluding comment is the clarity this passage brings to the debate between continuationists (like us, at Convergence) and cessationists. Ephesians 2:20 is the cessationist's go-to text, their trump card, so to speak.

The cessationist insists that, according to the analogy Paul employs, apostles and prophets belong to the period of the foundation, not the superstructure. That is to say, these two groups, apostles and prophets, and their respective gifts were designed by God to operate only during the early years of the church's existence in order to lay the once-for-all foundation.

The cessationist argument fails to take note of vv. 21-22 where Paul refers to the superstructure of the church as under construction, so to speak, *as he speaks/writes* (note the consistent use of the present tenses in vv. 21-22). In other words, the apostles and prophets of v. 20, among whom was Paul, were also contributing to the superstructure, of which the Ephesians were a contemporary part, simultaneous with their laying the foundation on which it was being built. We must be careful not to push the metaphor beyond what Paul intended by it.

Furthermore, on the cessationist's view, *all* NT prophets functioned foundationally. But there is nothing to suggest that "the prophets" in Ephesians 2:20 is an exhaustive reference to all possible prophets in the church. Why should we conclude that the only kind of prophetic activity is "foundational" in nature, especially in light of what the NT says about the extent and effect of prophetic ministry? It simply isn't possible to believe that all prophetic utterances were part of the once-for-all foundation of the church. For one thing, the NT nowhere says they were. For another, it portrays prophetic ministry in an entirely different light from the one most cessationists attempt to deduce from Ephesians 2:20. Surely not everyone who ministered prophetically was apostolic. Therefore, the cessation of the latter is no argument for the cessation of the former.

To suggest that Ephesians 2:20 has in view *all possible prophets* active in the early church does not measure up to what we read about the gift of prophecy in the rest of the NT. Are we to believe that all those who prophesied on the day of Pentecost, "sons and daughters, young men, old men, bondslaves, both men and women," were laying the foundation of the church? Are we to believe that "all mankind" (Acts 2:17) in the early church were contributors to its once-for-all foundation?

The cessationist is asking us to believe that the long-awaited promise in Joel 2:28 of the unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit on "all flesh", with its resultant revelatory activity of dreams, visions, and prophecy, was exhaustively fulfilled in only a handful of individuals whose gifting functioned in an exclusively foundational, initiatory, and therefore temporary fashion! Does this theory adequately explain the text? Is the revelatory and charismatic experience of the Spirit, foretold by Joel and cited by Peter, exhaustively fulfilled in a small minority of believers in a mere sixty-year span in only the first century of the church? It seems rather that Joel 2 and Acts 2 are describing normative Christian experience for the entire Christian community in the whole of the New Covenant age, called the "latter days".

Cessationism would also require us to believe that a group of anonymous disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7) who prophesied upon their conversion (none of which, be it noted, was ever recorded or mentioned again) did so with a view to laying the foundation of the church. It is no less a strain to think that the four daughters of Philip were a part of the once-for-all foundation of the church (Acts 21:9).

On the cessationist's thesis, all prophetic activity is foundation-laying activity. But if it were, it seems unlikely that Paul would have spoken of prophecy as a gift bestowed to common people for the "common good" of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7-10). Are we to believe that Paul exhorted all believers in every church to earnestly desire that they exercise foundational significance for the universal church (see 1 Cor. 14:1)? On the contrary, prophecy is to be desired because its purpose is to communicate revelation from God that will "encourage" those who are discouraged, "console" those who are disconsolate, and "edify" those who are weak and untaught (1 Cor. 14:3).

Again, I must ask, how does the exposure of an unbeliever's secret sins in the churches at Corinth and Thessalonica and Rome and Laodicea and throughout the inhabited earth, sins such as greed, lust, anger, selfishness, etc., function in laying the once-for-all foundation of the universal church of Jesus Christ? Yet, this is one of the primary purposes for the prophetic gift (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Paul anticipated that every time Christians gathered for worship that, at least potentially, each believer would come with or contribute, among other things, a "revelation" (1 Cor. 14:26). He anticipated that a normal part of Christian experience was receiving revelatory data or insight from God. It is difficult to read his instruction for corporate worship and conclude that he viewed all revelatory, and thus prophetic, ministry as exclusively foundational for the universal church. There must have been thousands upon thousands of revelations and prophetic utterances throughout the hundreds of churches over the course of the years between Pentecost and the close of the NT canon.

Are we to believe that this multitude of people and their even greater multitude of prophetic words constituted the once-for-all foundation of the church?

The cessationist seems to believe that once apostles and prophets ceased to function foundationally, they ceased to function altogether, as if the only purpose for apostles and prophets was to lay the foundation of the church. Nowhere does the NT say this, least of all in Ephesians 2:20. This text simply asserts that apostles and prophets laid the foundation once and for all and then ceased to function *in that capacity*. But nothing suggests that they ceased to function in other capacities, much less that they ceased to exist altogether. Certainly it is true that *only* apostles and prophets lay the foundation of the church, but it is anything but certain that such is the *only* thing they do.

In a word, the portrayal in Acts and 1 Corinthians of who could prophesy and how it was to be exercised in the life of the church simply does not fit with the cessationist assertion that Ephesians 2:20 describes all possible prophets, every one of whom functioned as part of the once-for-all foundation of the church. Rather, Paul is there describing a limited group of prophets who were closely connected to the apostles, both of which groups spoke Scripture-quality words essential to the foundation of the church universal.

I conclude that nothing in Ephesians 2:20 (or any other biblical text) suggests, much less requires, that we believe the gift of prophecy ceased following the foundational period of NT church life.