

"Peace". Ephesians 2: 11-22

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1. Introduction

This passage throws further light on the writers' great conception of the significance of the church as "the fullness of him who is being wholly filled (1:23). The ultimate divine purpose to bring the whole created universe unto an all-embracing unity is foreshadowed, and indeed is actually begun, in the church, where a divided humanity is brought together as Jew and Gentile are united in a single worshipping community. In Christ all the disabilities of an inheritance of heathendom are overcome, and all the privileges of access to Himself which God had accorded to his ancient people of Israel are granted freely and fully to the Gentile believers. The Church is now depicted under the figure of the living temple, in which Jewish and Gentile elements are merged - a universal house of worship, inhabited by the Spirit of God.

2. Jew and Gentile are united in the Church (Verse 11)

The literal historical setting of this passage makes no great appeal to the modern reader. The union between Jew and Gentile was an outstanding event to Paul and others in his time. It is difficult to accept that the victory which Paul won for the Gentile converts was one of the most important in all human history.

We can look at these verses and make them real as we face the problems of peace and unity in our times. We need not limit their meaning to a particular issue of long ago. The issue narrowed down was one of sacramental unity. Could a Gentile become a Christian without being circumcised? Could circumcised and uncircumcised have fellowship at the Lord's Supper? The main issue of disunity today is the question of inter-communion. Gentile Christians as well as Jewish Christians could not easily have conceived of a church without a definite initiation rite such as baptism or the fellowship meal Jesus instituted. The backgrounds of their tradition, race and culture had to be overcome.

In our times two factors hamper unity. On the one hand we have sectarianism and on the other race. Table-fellowship is the area of conflict. The fellowship at the Lord's Supper must be carried unto the secular social sphere also.

3. Having no Hope and without God in the World (Verse 12)

We will all agree that this is a very important verse. Paul paints a picture of the situation of the Gentiles in their preconversion period. This picture is also relevant today. The plight is delineated as being,

christless, godless, hopeless. Secularism one may safely say must come to this in the end, for to live without Christ is to live today, as in the time of the New Testament Gentiles, without hope, and without God in the world.

4. Unity in Christ (Verse 13:14)

The power of the Gospel to unify and to break down the dividing wall of hostility is amazing. The unifying power of the Gospel cannot be thwarted.

As the older and younger provinces of our *Unitas Fratrum* meet, we can experience visible affirmation of our texts. The blood of the Lamb has a strangely melting power over congealed hearts. God had devised his sublime medium of reconciliation. Upon these Gentile dwellers in darkness, the glory of the Lord had shone, bringing health as well as dawn of day, peace as well as enlightenment.

The drama of death and resurrection may have to repeat itself. The Christian churches far off and near, minority fellowship in the nations, may become again the "saving remnant" of world history.

5. Commandments and Ordinances (Verse 15)

The author rejoices in the fact that Christ abolished "in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances". But he does not read out of the Church the Jewish Christians, who still cling to ordinances. The law is still "just and good" (Rom. 7:12). Even legalism can be permitted and have a useful place in Christian life. But Christ remains Lord of His church. "Commandment and Ordinances, if man-made, dare not become obstacles which destroy fellowship in Christ - Unity in the Spirit comes first." Our epistle defines this as "one new man in place of two".

6. One Body through the Cross (Verse 16)

At Calvary as nowhere else, a perfect chord has been struck which reattunes the rasping discords of human jealousy and rancour. A higher unity, even in the mundane sphere of things, may absorb feuds seemingly unresolvable.

Christians of every name assert that the church is "one body" and should manifest itself as such. The word church rarely occurs in Christian prayers or creeds without the adjective "one" attached to it. How desperately we try to make the church one! Christian history is strewn with Synods and Councils, with ecumenical Conferences on church unity. But in the final act unity must come from above. It can only come through the cross of Christ. Shared forgiveness and shared repentance through the Cross of Christ are the ultimate gifts of God.

7. The Far off and the Near (Verse 17)

Can we take these words out of the original context, in which they describe the Jewish and Gentile division? This can be applied in two situations. Firstly, the Missionary enterprise. We, today, in the *Unitas Fratrum*, are witness to it. The comments in verse 13 must be recalled. In this world that is crumbling, a city of God is being built by God himself.

Secondly, the "far off" and "near" can take us to the thought world of psychology. Modern means of communication and travel are shrinking our world. But the divisions caused by hate, distrust, oppression and racism cannot be cured by technological means. Only Christian grace can bring peace and reconciliation. The Christian Gospel is called "the word of reconciliation" (2. Cor. 5:19).

8. Unity in the Holy Spirit (Verse 18)

"For through Him", in His name and by virtue of His mediation, "we both have access", admission, into the presence of God, who is become the common reconciled Father of both; the throne of grace is erected for us to come to; and liberty of approach to that throne is allowed to us. Our "access is by the Holy Spirit". Christ purchased for us leave to come to God and the Spirit gives us the heart to come and strength to come, even grace to serve God acceptably. We draw nigh to God, through Jesus Christ by the help of the Spirit.

Christians find unity in Christ. This means concretely in the church. For the Holy Spirit, thought of as historically imparted to the church at Pentecost, is that "Spirit" which gives life to the body of Christ. Holy Spirit and church are inseparable in the New Testament.

9. Fellow Citizens with the Saints (Verse 19 und 20)

These verses contain certain phrases which have become sacred in the liturgical vocabulary of the Christian church - "fellow Citizens with the saints"... "the household of God"... the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, and a "holy temple in the Lord". The epistle to the Ephesians can be called a liturgical epistle. It makes a stage in the life of the Christian Community when tradition has begun to create a formalized community language.

As the Gentiles were once grafted unto the chosen race, long thought of as limited to the Jews, so children of every race under heaven - "strangers and foreigners" - are today becoming one with the Christians of the older European tradition. The phrase "the household of God" is one of the definitions of the church in the New Testament. Less frequently used than "The body of Christ", it yet contains rich significance. A household can be a model for any society.

Justice and law are there, but they are transformed into grace by family oneness. Love fulfills the law. Need, not earned right, determines privilege. The church of Christ resembles a household more than a political state.

The church's democracy is that of equality before God. In the long history of man the struggle for equality has been a noble one, yet full of the blood of revolutions and recurring heartbreak. It has shared in the cruelty of most attempts to realize dreams and fulfillment of ideologies. Is there, indeed a solution for the problem of inequality except in "the household" of God?

10. The Church and Temple (Verse 21-22)

The word temple has much tradition behind it. The earliest Christians, themselves continuing Jewish worship practices, nurtured the memory of centuries when they thought of the temple towering over the city of

David and symbolizing the religion of their fathers.

This idea of temple must have changed with the Gentile-Christian groups. They worshipped in houses. The word temple became a metaphor. "The most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts. 7:48). The Christian congregation was now God's temple. What does the word church mean to the average man today? Does he not think first of the building? The word church rightly denotes both. The ranking of connotations should be reversed - people of God first and then the architectural symbol. The church of Christ is first of all a social and not architectural creation. It is a people-body, a hard and sometimes harsh and unpleasing thing, human, sinful, made up of men and women whom we may not like. But such a group is literally "a habitation of God through the Spirit". It is "a holy temple in the Lord."

The Holy Spirit, given opportunity, can fashion a household of God worthy of the name of temple. But only the Holy Spirit can build a church. Two or three gathered together in the name of Christ, knit together by the band of forgiving love are an "architectural wonder before which even the angels of heaven stand in awe".